

Gothic Urbanism in Contemporary African Fiction

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

This project surveys representations of the African city in contemporary Nigerian and South African narratives by focusing on how they employ Gothic techniques as a means of drawing the African urban landscape into being. The texts that comprise my objects of study are South African author Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Nineveh* (2011), which takes as its setting contemporary Cape Town; *Lagoon* (2014) by American-Nigerian author Nnedi Okorafor, who sets her tale in present-day Lagos; and *Zoo City* (2010) by Lauren Beukes, another South African author who locates her narrative in a near-future version of Johannesburg. I find that these fictions are bound by a shared investment in mobilising the apparatus of the Gothic genre to provide readers with a unique imagining of contemporary African urbanity. I argue that the Gothic urbanism which these texts unfold enables the ascendance of generative, anti-dualist modes of reading the contemporary African city that are simultaneously real and imagined, old and new, global and local, dark and light – modes that perform as much a discourse of the past as a dialogue on the future. The study concludes by making some reflections on the future-visions that these Gothic urban-texts elicit, imaginings that I argue engender useful reflection on the relationship between culture and environment, and thus prompt the contemporary reader to consider the global future – and, as such, situate Africa at the forefront of planetary discourse. I suggest that *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* produce not simply a Gothic envisioning of Africa's metropolitan centres, but also a budding Gothic aesthetic of the African Anthropocene. In contrast to the 1980's tradition of Gothic writing in Africa, these novels are opening up into the twenty-first century to reflect on the future of the African city – but also on the futures that lie beyond the urban, beyond culture, beyond the human.

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Gothic Urbanism in Contemporary African Fiction

This project makes several lines of enquiry into the contemporary African city by closely considering its Gothic representation in recent Nigerian and South African fiction. To do this, I examine the writings of three female African writers, whose fictions are bound by a shared investment in mobilising the devices of the Gothic genre to provide readers with a unique imagining of contemporary African urbanity. The texts that I have chosen to focus my analysis on are *Nineveh* (2011) by South African author Henrietta Rose-Innes, which takes as its setting contemporary Cape Town; *Lagoon* (2014) by American-Nigerian author Nnedi Okorafor, who sets her tale in present-day Lagos; and *Zoo City* (2010) by Lauren Beukes, another South African author, who locates her narrative in a near-future version of Johannesburg. The aim of this study is to investigate how Gothic manifests in these three African novels and to *what end*; I wish to examine, in other words, what value this particular fictional mode encodes in these texts by focusing on Rose-Innes, Okorafor and Beukes's mobilisation of Gothic motifs in order to draw the African urban landscape into being. This project asks, in short, whether the Gothic urbanism performed in *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* can help us understand the African city anew.

Let us begin with some important definitions, so that we may know what we are dealing with when I employ the term 'Gothic' in the pages ahead. For the purposes of this study, I follow Jerrold E Hogle's formulation of Gothic, which argues that one of the genre's defining characteristics is an investment in the oscillation 'between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural' (2002: 2). For Hogle, Gothic is first and foremost a fictional form that raises 'the possibility that the boundaries between these [states] may have been crossed' by presenting to us 'opposed positions of many kinds' that 'keep blurring into each other' (2002: 3 - 16). An interest in liminal states and thresholds is thus one of the main themes that we encounter in Gothic texts: as David Punter succinctly puts it, Gothic fictions 'serve the important function of removing the illusory halo of certainty from the so-called "natural" world' (1996: 183). Following Punter and Hogle, Gothic can be understood as the genre of *transgression* par excellence: in these cultural works, 'margins become the norm' such that Gothic looks to disclose what Fred Botting terms 'an underlying instability, an absence, at the heart of any social or symbolic structure' (2002: 286). Gothic often speaks, in other words, of that which we consider to be conventionally unacceptable or find uncomfortable; that is to say that Gothic casts light on the *taboo*: it is here, as Punter suggests, 'that the vital effort of Gothic fiction resides', in 'those areas of socio-psychological life which offend, which are suppressed, which are generally swept under the carpet in the interest of social and psychological equilibrium' (1996:

184).

All three of the texts that comprise this study are concerned, in varying ways, with this Gothic theme of suppression and secrecy. *Nineveh*, for example, follows the tale of Katya Grubbs – a ‘pest relocation expert’ (Rose-Innes, 2011: 197) who possesses an acute awareness of the world that lies hidden underneath Cape Town’s surface, while Okorafor’s *Lagoon* similarly features a preoccupation with a Gothic sense of latency: one of the novel’s central protagonists, Adaora, possesses a secret ‘invisible force’ (Okorafor, 2014: 243) that is released within her after a magical alien emerges one day from the sea and thereafter infiltrates the city of Lagos. *Zoo City*, too, manifests an interest in things that lie concealed from sight: the novel’s story takes the form of a crime-thriller that centres around Zinzi, an ex-convict who shares a supernatural connection with an animal named Sloth, who travels with Zinzi as she traverses Johannesburg in search of a missing teenage girl – a search that causes her to unearth a gruesome secret that lies embedded in the city’s core. Gothic’s concern with concealment and mystery is a noticeable thread, then, which runs throughout all of these fictional works. It should be noted, however, that the investment in Gothic which we encounter in *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* is equally related to the concern that they evince with tropes that mark the broader field of speculative fiction (SF) – speculative fiction understood here as a fictional genre encompassing any fantastical, futuristic or supernatural features¹. Gothic and SF can be understood as associated, in other words, through their shared interest in ‘the possibilities of supernatural’ (2002: 2) to which we have seen Hogle, in his formulation of Gothic, refer.

In this sense, Gothic’s manifestation in *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* aligns these novels with a recent outpouring of experimental cultural production generated by African creatives since the turn of the millennium. Perhaps the most widely recognised works to emerge from this field are the films of South African filmmaker, Neill Blomkamp, whose sci-fi action film *District 9* generated much controversy² and success when it was released in 2009. We should place alongside Blomkamp’s movie the films of Kenyan filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu, whose 2010 short-film ‘Pumzi’ also makes use of the apparatus of the global sci-fi genre to speculate on what might constitute future African post-apocalyptic topographies. These concerns resonate with many of

¹ See Juliet McKenna, online resource available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/18/genre-debate-science-fiction-speculative-literary>. [Accessed 11 October 2015].

² Controversial, in particular, for the film’s stereotypical and offensive portrayal of an illegal syndicate of Nigerians. See ‘*District 9*: a Roundtable’, *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 11: 1–2.

those that we encounter in recently published African fictions – in his novella ‘Proposition 23’ (2013) Nigerian author Eje Okogu makes use of various speculative elements to generate a fictional imagining of a snow-covered version of Lagos in the twenty-second century, while well-known British-Nigerian author Helen Oyeyemi turns in *The Icarus Girl* (2004) to what Diana Mafe describes as the genre of ‘post-colonial Female Gothic’ to provide readers with a female take on the traditionally male-dominated ‘trajectory of fantastical Yoruba writing on the bush’ (2012: 21).

Evidently, this burgeoning production of experimental African fiction has become a continent-wide phenomenon, marking the African landscape with work produced from both its centres and its peripheries. These African works are termed ‘experimental’ not because they invent new fictional modes, but rather because they ‘take on many canonical [global genre] tropes and suit them’, as Matthew Omelsky asserts, ‘to the particularities of their African spaces’ (2014: 38). Joyce Nyairo offers us another perspective on this idea by making use of the Kenyan practice of ‘jua kali’ – the informal sector of the continent that she describes as ‘the creative impetus of cultural life in modern Africa’ in order to invoke the project of African cultural production as one that ‘is not about how the local gets drawn into and absorbed by Western modernity, but rather...about the artful forging of local derivatives of modernity’ (2001: 131). Following Nyairo, we should understand the turn to Gothic in *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* as articulating the ways in which the global appeals to the construction of local values and practices; these are texts, in other words, that take as their inspiration both local and global influences, and are thus works that are shaped from within as well as from without. The fictions of Rose-Innes, Okorafor, and Beukes contribute, in this way, to the formation of an African aesthetic that has become ‘more mutant and global than ever’; these texts evince the emergence of a cultural moment ‘poised’, to borrow from Omelsky, ‘to move into radically new speculative and imaginative terrain’ (2014: 38). Salient here is that many works of recent African cultural production have turned to the transnational speculative form – be it a subgenre of Gothic or SF or a combination of these genres – to produce new cultural imaginings of Africa, and thus allow for reflection on how notions of the global and the local operate and interact in contemporary African thought. This project takes this notion as its point of departure, and expands on this idea by examining the new and imaginative African city-landscapes that are produced in *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* by way of their investment in the sensibilities of the global Gothic mode.

African Gothic

I want to take, as a precursor through which to theorise the African Gothic form that Beukes, Rose-Innes and Okorafor elaborate, a short play appropriately entitled ‘African Gothic’ by a South African playwright named Reza de Wet. ‘African Gothic’ was originally published in Afrikaans in 1985 under the title ‘Diepe Grond’ (Deep Earth), and was later translated into English in 2005. The title of the English text, ‘African Gothic’, is a play on the name of the 19th century painting ‘American Gothic’ by Grant Wood, a well-known oil painting featuring the rigid and colonial figures of a male and female who stand, with a large and menacing pitchfork between them, in front of their farmhouse. Like ‘American Gothic’, in de Wet’s play the farmhouse is also a prominent feature. The play is set in a crumbling and claustrophobic manor located on an old and run-down farm in the rural Free State. Inside the farmhouse live Sussie and Frikkie, an incestuous brother and sister who have not left their ruinous home in years. Significant to this play is that de Wet makes use of the Gothic thematic of the taboo to critique the preoccupation that the South African apartheid state of the time (the 1980’s) had with racial purity – a fixation raised, notably, through her portrayal of the incestuous siblings. Sussie and Frikkie break, however, more than one taboo: not only do they transgress sexual norms by sexually desiring one another, but they have also brutally murdered their parents – loyal members of the Afrikaner farming community – whose ghosts now make frequent visits to the siblings, compelling them to eternally remember their past transgressions. As a result of these apparitions, Sussie and Frikkie remain forever stagnant, unable to move beyond the violent actions that constitute their past – a stasis that finds form in both the children’s incestuous relationship, as well as in their inability to leave their farmland home even as it begins to fall into dereliction around them.

I invoke ‘African Gothic’ here to illustrate, firstly, the ways in which de Wet employs the devices of the Gothic form to execute a form of social and political commentary. According to Catherine Spooner, this investment in critical reflection is one of Gothic’s central concerns: ‘Gothic provides us’, as Spooner puts it, ‘with a language and lexicon through which anxieties both personal and collective can be narrativized’ (2006: 9). Punter similarly asserts that Gothic has been ‘from its very inception’ a form ‘related very closely to issues of national assertion and social organization’ – often “tak[ing] the stage” in foregrounding social issues and in forming social consciousness’ (2012: 4). Gothic, in other words, is not adverse to critical commentary; in fact, following Punter and Spooner, Gothic is a particularly socially engaged and politically-aware form of fiction-making. This is undoubtedly the case with ‘African Gothic’, which takes, significantly, as its setting an old, decaying and claustrophobic farmhouse, a common Gothic

setting³ which de Wet utilises as a means of depicting the political climate of South Africa during the time that she was writing – the 1980's – a period in the country's history that signalled the slow dismantling of apartheid. Note also that 'African Gothic' features a distinctive warping, through the ghosts of Frikkie and Sussie's parents, of the boundaries between reality and the supernatural, as well as between past and present – another Gothic hallmark that de Wet espouses to articulate the anxieties that constituted South Africa's interregnum period, a particularly anxious time in Afrikaner history. During this time, the question of the future hung particularly heavily over the national Afrikaner consciousness, a consciousness marked by what Elleke Boehmer formulates as 'a widespread perception of an imminent, incipient or ongoing disintegration of things', and by invocations of a future 'of which it was impossible to imagine the shape' (1998: 45 & 50). To imagine the South African post-apartheid future was, in other words, a particularly fraught task for those who fell under the auspices of a national Afrikanerdom poised on the precipice of its ruination. This unease is thus registered and reflected by de Wet – an Afrikaner herself – in 'African Gothic' through her portrayal of the continual return of the siblings' parents, who manifest the ongoing legacy of the past and its burdens on the present, as well as by her depiction of Sussie and Frikkie's inability to escape the structure of the crumbling farmhouse – as Sussie informs us, '*I can't go out of the gate*' (2005: 38).

In 'African Gothic' we thus encounter the following Gothic sensibilities: the ruinous and claustrophobic setting; the porosity of boundaries between states; the haunting of the past into the present, and, finally, the taboo – that which Punter terms 'the lineaments of the unacceptable' (1996: 189). Central, then, to the construction of this African text is the notion of transgression and subversion; much of the play features, after all, figures that come from places that exist outside of the category of reality and thereby fall into states of "in-between-ness". According to Botting, such an interest in 'liminal figures' is another of Gothic's focal ingredients, because these figures – such as spectres, monsters or aliens – exist on the margins between states, 'on the borders', as Botting puts it, 'between life and death, between human [and] animal identities' (2002: 288). Following Botting, monster-figures serve the function of embodying Gothic's investment in transgression because they disturb the borders that allow us to differentiate between past and present, inside and outside, home and foreignness, human and non-human, and are thus staple features that many Gothic fictions employ to question the stability of these ontological distinctions. Gothic's liminal energies are features, in other words,

³ 'A Gothic tale usually takes place', as Hogle reminds us, 'in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large old house or theatre, an aging city or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building, or some new recreation of an older venue, such as an office with old filing cabinets, an overworked spaceship, or a computer memory' (2002: 2).

of the genre's investment in subversion – in questioning what we take to be 'the established standards of normality' (Hogle, 2002: 7)

It is particularly significant, for example, that 'African Gothic' turns to the pastoral landscape and, in doing so, reframes and subverts the values and order inscribed by the tradition of the South African *plaasroman* – the traditional farm novel characterised by a thematic investment in white land ownership. The *plaasroman*, as J.M Coetzee asserts in *White Writing*, typically celebrates the 'renewal of peasant order'; it commemorates the return to a system of 'patriarchal authority' where every member of society – every man, woman and child – submits and takes up their place in a hierarchy led by a white man (1988: 79). Thus, through her implementation of Gothic's machinery, de Wet successfully disrupts this traditional narrative – in which the farm is presented as the seat of natural patriarchal order – a subversion that finds form in the *enfants terrible*, Sussie and Frikkie, who destabilise the traditional family dynamic by sexually desiring one another, and who also subvert the idyllic representations to which we find reference in the traditional *plaasroman* by allowing the family farm to fall into wrack and ruin, thereby rendering the pastoral landscape a place of disorder, shame and nightmares⁴.

I want to take cognisance of one final element of Gothic's apparatus, which we find at work in the play's Afrikaans title – 'Diepe Grond'. This name translates roughly into English as 'Deep Earth', and in it we encounter reference to the Gothic preoccupation with things buried under the ground or concealed from sight; with those skeletons, to make use of a cliché, which lie in the closet where they can be secreted away far from view. This is another of Gothic's many concerns: 'the Gothic mind', says Punter, 'is a suspicious mind' in that it is forever aware that 'below the apparent surface of the world, there are hidden depths, even if the messages we receive from these depths are never entirely clear' (2011: 11). 'African Gothic' centres on this Gothic theme of hidden secrets – namely, the secret of the death of Sussie and Frikkie's authoritarian parents, a mystery that is only solved for us at the play's climax. However, a fearful sense is created throughout the play that the deaths of the sibling's parents were the doing of their children: Sussie and Frikkie, for example, spend their days guilt-ridden and in constant fear, terrified that if they close their eyes at night they will be met with the accusatory glare of their deceased mother: 'I'm frightened' says Sussie, 'that I'll see her face...pressed against the glass!' (2005: 50). As a result, Sussie now passes her days imitating the behaviour of herself as child – a time when she was innocent – because she imagines her mother's invisible presence looming permanently over her, watching to see if 'I'm bad...a bad girl...a disgrace to our family' (2005:

⁴ See also in this regard Duncan, R. 'Paricide on the Plaas: Reza de Wet's African Gothic'. Online resource available at: <http://www.gothic.stir.ac.uk/guestblog/parricide-on-the-plaas-reza-de-wets-african-gothic>. [accessed 11 November 2014]

36). Frikkie, likewise, is unable to rid himself of a stubborn sense of unease: he remains incapable of sleeping at night due to a lingering smell in the house that reminds him of his parents: 'I can smell *them*...and it's getting stronger. The whole room...stinks of them' (2005: 25). Thus do the children pass their days forevermore: eternally frightened that their dead parents are standing somewhere out of sight 'looking at us... watching us...seeing everything that we do' (2005: 51).

Contemporary Gothic Urbanism

Through a reading of de Wet's 'African Gothic' we are thus able to locate and better comprehend Gothic and its primary areas of concern – namely, its preoccupation with ruinous and disordered locations, with ghosts and temporal hauntings, with the supernatural, with monstrous figures, with hidden secrets, with the taboo, and lastly, with the notion of subversion and transgression. In this project, I aim to move away from the timeframe during which de Wet was writing, as I wish to consider how this trajectory of Gothic writing in Africa is elaborated by Beukes, Okorafor and Rose-Innes, whose writings extend this tradition of African Gothic fiction from the 1980's into the contemporary moment. My intention here is thus to focus on Gothic's manifestation on three recent African texts, *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City*, which all look to the ingredients of this form to shape into form a contrasting setting to that of de Wet's rural landscape – namely the city. Gothic, as we will see, is present in these fictional urban landscapes in complex and imaginative ways that give rise to more nuanced readings of three African urban centres – Cape Town, Lagos and Johannesburg. In these three texts, Gothic is utilised as a means of imagining the African urban environment as a place that seeps across divides and contrasts, and that encompasses a range of geographies across real and imagined frontiers.

I begin, in my first chapter, with Rose-Innes's *Nineveh*. Here, I focus my analysis on the novel's interest in Gothic's liminal energies – in those thresholds and states of in-between-ness that Gothic finds so compelling – and read these as sites of subversion to be brought against the workings of neoliberalism in Cape Town. According to Tony Roshan Samara, Cape Town today is under the power of global neoliberalism, which is the economic policy espoused by the Democratic Alliance (DA) – the municipal government currently in charge of managing the city. This is key for Samara, who sees the DA's neoliberal agenda as currently serving to deepen, rather than dismantle, the borders and inequalities effected by South Africa's old apartheid regime: in Cape Town, argues Samara, 'the divisions of the apartheid era are reproduced and managed under conditions of a transnational network of neoliberal urban governance' (2012: 4). We find reference to these divisions in *Nineveh*'s portrayal of Cape Town, raised symbolically through Rose-Innes's depiction of 'Nineveh', a gated and luxurious housing development

situated on the metropole's peripheral wetlands, which the novel's protagonist, Katya Grubbs, takes to be 'some slightly future Cape Town' (2011: 51). Katya's involvement with Nineveh centres on a mysterious beetle infestation that swarms the housing estate every time it rains – an infestation that she must clear by drawing on her skills of '*policing borders*' (2011: 19, italics mine) so that she may return Nineveh to its once-sterile, orderly and contained state. Central, thus, to this text is an interest in themes of order and containment, which Rose-Innes looks to subvert by mobilising the liminal sensibilities of the Gothic tradition to destabilise the seemingly fixed state of the urban. Gothic here is intimately linked to the subversion of urban foreclosure, actualised in the text through its investment in those Gothic spaces where things overlap and blur into one another, in those states where order is *overthrown* – such that *Nineveh* performs as much a discourse of post-apartheid possibility as one of neoliberal disruption.

I move, in the second chapter, from South to West to consider another of Africa's coastal cities: Lagos. Here, I attend to this city's representation in Okorafor's *Lagoon*. Lagos is, of course, a particularly fascinating city to think with and from – given that this metropolitan centre is at the forefront of what Rem Koolhaas terms 'globalising modernity' (2002: 175). According to Koolhaas, Lagos is the fastest growing city in the world and features a unique and ingenious combination of resourcefulness with complete disorder incomparable to cities elsewhere (2002: 175 - 206). Lagos is similarly imagined in Okorafor's novel as an entropic city, but it is also portrayed as a city that has, as one of *Lagoon*'s many characters suggests, 'much to give the world – and to show it' (2014: 279). *Lagoon* follows the story of its three main protagonists, Adaora, Agu and Anthony, who together witness the arrival of a magical shape-shifting alien who steps out of the ocean one day and onto the shores of Lagos' Bar Beach. Hereafter, the alien enters the city and catalyses Lagos' transformation into an enchanted urban local replete with a series of human and non-human interdependencies. Thus do we encounter in *Lagoon* a particularly keen interest in ecological themes – themes that serve to align the novel with what has recently been termed the 'EcoGothic': an offshoot of the Gothic mode which 'engages', according to David Del Principe, 'with environment and species-related issues' (2014: 1). While elements of the EcoGothic run through all three of my chosen texts, these find a particularly strong reverberation in *Lagoon*, which takes as its focal site of optimism the non-human figure of the alien. This figure, as we will see, is what catalyses the disruption of the city's bio-social dichotomies and thereafter instigates the renewal of Lagos' environmental fabric. The alien's presence serves, too, to raise from the city's hidden depths – in quintessential Gothic fashion – various mythical and magical creatures, who subsequently merge with the land of the urbanites to form a unique urban environment of entropy and enchantment. I argue that it is from this

Gothic crucible – cacophonous as it is with a variety of connections between city and sea, magic and modern, old and new, human and non-human – that *Lagoon* looks to project the potential birthing of a new African urban order.

I extend this thread of enchantment into my final chapter, which concerns Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*. Set in a near-future revisioning of Johannesburg, this text depicts the city as a place 'twisted by crime and magic' (Beukes, 2010: 309) – as well as a space in which the spectres of the past continually resurface. I focus the first half of my chapter on Beukes's representation of Johannesburg's gated suburbs. Here, I read the fortified community as a Gothic site of darkness and decay; as a haunted and rotten urban imaginary home to a gruesome secret that lies hidden in its core. The next section contrasts the gated community with the home of *Zoo City*'s protagonist, Zinzi December – an ex-convict forced to live in Hillbrow, one of Johannesburg's most notorious neighbourhoods, due to a magical interspecies relationship that she shares with an animal named Sloth. In this second section, I suggest that Beukes's rendition of Hillbrow stands in contrast with those decayed and rotten parts of Johannesburg represented by the gated suburb. By drawing on the Johannesburg writings of Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, I argue that Hillbrow operates in this narrative as place of connection and light – a place representative of what these critics term 'invention and utopian dreams' (2008: 22). This reading is indebted to my understanding of Johannesburg as a city characterised by a series of interactions between its shiny surface, glossy edges and dark underworld – a composition that I borrow from Mbembe and Nuttall, who argue that 'this dialectic between the underground, the surfaces and the edges is, more than any other feature, the main characteristic of the African modern, of which Johannesburg is the epitome' (2008: 17). I suggest that this discourse is reframed and extended in *Zoo City* through its Gothic blending of Johannesburg's material and magical elements, a Gothic blurring of binaries which I read as offering a particular purchase on modes of reading this African city as simultaneously dark and light, real and imagined, familiar and unfamiliar – filled in equal parts with hopelessness and hope.

'How we write the city' asserts Lindsay Bremner, 'invents it, brings it into being, allows it to exist in very specific ways' (2010: 4). This notion informs much of my thinking in the pages that follow, which look to consider the implications of Bremner's suggestion by investigating how the writings of Rose-Innes, Okorafor and Beukes allow the African city to exist in Gothic ways that not only usher the African Gothic tradition into the new millennium, but also give rise to provocative means of perceiving the metropolis that are new and inventive – and thus hold the capacity to provoke valuable insights in the workings of present-day African urbanisms. 'Genre', as John Frow reminds us, 'is a form of symbolic action...that makes things happen by

actively shaping the way we understand the world' (2006: 2). In this sense, I follow Harry Garuba's formulation of genre criticism, which suggests that an 'approach through genre can allow us to re-theorise 'Africa' in a non-essentializing way' (2010: 245). The connections that I draw, in the pages that follow, between Gothic and these texts are quite various: I read *Zoo City*, for example, as locating itself comfortably within a recognisable Gothic tradition, while *Lagoon* and *Nineveh* are connected to Gothic in more shadowy ways, through common themes, imagery and interests. The project maintains, however, that a link exists between *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* – an interest in the African metropolis and a turn to Gothic's machinery to imagine the city in new and generative ways. I make a claim for the imaginative form of urbanism that these texts unfold by mobilising the energies of the Gothic genre to enable the ascendance of inventive modes of reading the contemporary African city – modes of reading as yet unthought or imagined.

Gothic Porosity: Becoming-Insect and the Neoliberal City in *Nineveh*

Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.

- Michel Foucault, 1983

There is no way to keep the shape of things. One house
falls, another rises.

- Henrietta Rose-Innes, 2011

This first chapter takes as its focus *Nineveh* (2011) by Henrietta Rose-Innes in order to closely consider the ways in which the narrative mobilises the liminal devices of the Gothic to render untenable the permanence of the urban form. To do this, the chapter attends to all that is porous in *Nineveh* – breached borders, hidden underworlds, nomadic living – to illustrate how these features are invested with Gothic potentiality and consequently utilised as tools to subvert the stability of the narrative’s built environment. Gothic, as David Punter reminds us, always finds its home ‘in liminal spaces, conditions of “in-between-ness”, where we are not quite sure what it is we are seeing or what cultural codes really prevail’ (2011: 11). ‘These conditions’, argues Punter, ‘are conditions of unease’ in that ‘they are conditions where our perceptions are troubled and confounded’ (2011: 11). Yet, ‘it is for this very reason’, maintains Punter, ‘that the Gothic perspective can shed new light: not the clear, precise light which we imagine when we think of the “enlightenment”, in all the many meanings of the term, but a different kind of light which also includes darkness and shadow’ (2011: 11).

Following Punter, this chapter is concerned with the ‘new light’ that is encoded in *Nineveh*’s pages as the result of its investment in the Gothic apparatus of liminality. This novel is set in contemporary Cape Town, and as Rose-Innes states in various interviews, refuses the apocalyptic register in favour of a fictional rendering that presents ‘change [as] inevitable, irresistible and not necessarily undesirable’¹. The vision projected by *Nineveh* is thus not an entirely bleak one, but rather a call for thinking through Cape Town in alternative ways that shun sedentary, curtailed narratives such as the apocalypse in order to present the reader with a more nomadic – and therefore unfixed – perception of the city. I argue that the narrative’s nomadic conclusion is what furnishes *Nineveh*’s envisioning of future urban modes of belonging

¹Online resource available at: <http://africasacountry.com/2012/04/south-african-write-henrietta-rose-innes-nineveh/> [Date accessed: 20 June 2015]

constituted by movement and mobility; modes that are not permanent or stagnant, but that are in flux, non-unitary and always in the process of becoming. This chapter proposes that this nomadic vision allows for more complex, open-ended and multi-webbed imaginings of Cape Town – and thus acts a way of writing against dominant perceptions of the post-apartheid city, which, as Tony Roshan Samara describes it, has become more ‘fortified’ and ‘unequal’ than ever before due to its ‘neoliberal governance regimes’ (2011: 181).

Nineveh, as its title suggests, appropriates its plot from the tale of the Mesopotamian city of Nineveh, one of the oldest and most splendid cities in antiquity. One of the greatest intellectual and cultural centres of its time, Nineveh’s history comprises numerous cycles of destruction and restoration. The original city was constructed as early as 6000 BCE and soon became a religious centre for the worship of the goddess Ishtar – the Assyrian goddess of fertility, love and war. The temple of Ishtar was destroyed, however, by an earthquake and rebuilt in 2260 BCE by Akkadian king Manishtusu. Many more improvements and renovations were added to the city by Nineveh’s next three rulers, Kings Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, whose various additions resulted in the city’s growth in grandeur, fame and size. After the death of King Ashurbanipal, Nineveh was sacked and burned down by the combined forces of the Babylonians, Persians and Medes, and its ruins subsequently buried under the earth. Nineveh’s vestiges were later uncovered in the 1800’s, and its ruins marked today by two mounds of sand, the Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus, which are all that is left of this once-great city².

Building on this historical tale, Rose-Innes similarly subjects her version of Nineveh – a fortified and luxurious apartment block situated on the outskirts of Cape Town – to impending ruin, but writes the novel as a way of contemplating chaos ‘not as an end point, but perhaps the start of a new cycle, a different order’³. The story of the ancient Assyrian city thus affords an apt metaphor for the impermanence of all that is systematic and ordered; an instability that Rose-Innes insists is generative of *potentiality*: ‘The imagery’, she says, ‘of ancient, abandoned cities suggests that systems – cities, civilizations, families – are eternally falling apart and being replaced by something else, and that we should not fear that process but embrace it’⁴. To this end, nature as uncontrollable force plays a considerable role in challenging the permanence of all that is man-made: as Rose-Innes describes it, the notion ‘of wild creatures inheriting human dwellings’

² See Joshua J Mark, online resource available at: <http://www.ancient.eu/nineveh/>. [Date accessed: 11 November 2015].

³ Online resource available at: <http://africasacountry.com/2012/04/south-african-write-henrietta-rose-inness-nineveh/> [Date accessed: 20 June 2015]

⁴ Online resource available at: <http://africasacountry.com/2012/04/south-african-write-henrietta-rose-inness-nineveh/> [Date accessed: 20 June 2015]

provides ‘a potent image of the order of things overthrown’⁵.

One of the ways in which this re-worlding is realised is through the figure of *Nineveh*’s protagonist, the fortuitously named Katya Grubbs, who possesses an acute awareness of ‘the entropy of built things’ (2011: 30). Katya runs ‘Painless Pest Relocations’ – a business specialising in the humane removal of unwanted creatures from a variety of locations in and around Cape Town. This business is an intentionally non-violent alternative to the extermination enterprise run by her father, Len Grubbs, who she hasn’t seen in years. *Nineveh*’s action is put into play when Katya is called in by Mr Brand, owner of Brand Properties, to help rid Nineveh of a mysterious infestation of beetles that swarm the estate every time it rains. This development is imagined by Katya ‘as some slightly future Cape Town’ (2011: 51) characterised by a sterile interior and fortified exterior: surrounding Nineveh are ‘high white walls’ that are ‘topped with electric wire and evenly spaced floodlights’ (2011: 52), while a strange sense of cleanliness marks the estate’s interior – ‘there’s something odd’, Katya tells us, ‘about the sterility of the place’ (2011: 64). Katya quickly comes to learn, however, that this fortress ‘is not impermeable as she had thought’ (2011: 110) but susceptible, like all built things, to ‘wear and tear...rot and disintegration’ (2011: 30). The reason for this is that Nineveh’s boundaries have long since been breached by her father, Len, who has been entering the city through an underground tunnel that he has dug in order to pillage the estate of its various building materials and sell these to the individuals who live in the shackland located at Nineveh’s borders.

We thus encounter in this text a Gothic preoccupation with a *hidden underneath*; with a secret underground world that is one of Gothic’s hallmarks. This notion of a hidden underworld is particularly significant to *Nineveh* because it is what gives rise to the narrative’s climax, which depicts Len and Katya watching helplessly, unable to stem the tide of thousands of beetles as they emerge, in characteristic Gothic fashion, from the depths of the earth and begin to eat away at Nineveh’s foundations. As the estate’s structures come undone, these meet with the worlds that lie at Nineveh’s edges – Cape Town’s shack and swampland. It is through a coalescence of these three sites that *Nineveh* looks to leave us with a hint of a re-ordered urban world: standing above the ruined development, Katya looks down and sees that

the place that was once so stable is not at all. It is rushing, swirling, all its bricks and tiles and phoney lions flushing out. Nothing can be contained. And, as the substance of Nineveh unravels, the swamp winds it up like yarn into a ball. Knitting new patterns, weaving Nineveh into the shacks and the city beyond (2011: 193).

⁵ Online resource available at: <http://dianeawerbeck.bookslive.co.za/blog/2011/08/23/wormhole-a-review-of-henrietta-rose-innes-nineveh/> [Date accessed: 20 June 2015]

Thus, it is through a celebration of disorder that *Nineveh* here formulates an imagining of prospective modes of urban belonging. What is offered in this scene, in other words, is an undoing of Cape Town's urban order – born, significantly, from a Gothic investment in the breaking of boundaries. As such, the narrative's vision of the urban future comprises a nexus of worlds brought to coalesce. I suggest, in the first stages of this chapter, that it is this porous, non-unitary and non-dualistically opposed vision that shapes the narrative's nomadic conclusion, which portrays Katya as giving up her business and home, and moving to live in her old van, travelling from one 'subtly different' part of Cape Town to another, looking to explore those Gothic sites that mark 'the places where such cities overlap' (2011: 206 - 207).

I focus the final stages of this chapter on this conclusion, and consider the creative possibilities that it proposes by reading *Nineveh*'s ending as the generative start of a new phase of Gothic writing in South African writing that shuns the tropes of curtailment – 'the narrowing of possibility and shutting down on tomorrow' (Boehmer, 1998: 48) – that characterised the apartheid novel of the 1980's. To do this, I read *Nineveh*'s finale with recourse to what Rosi Braidotti terms 'nomadic affirmative politics', a mode of critical thinking that takes as its 'central figuration' a 'process ontology that privileges change and motion over stability' (2011: 29). The novel's ending, as we will see, takes up this privileging of mobility and places it at the heart of its thinking about the futurity of Cape Town – such that the novel performs as much a discourse of post-apartheid possibility as one of the disruption of neoliberal policy in the city.

Confronting Neoliberalism in Post-Apartheid Cape Town

Katya Grubbs was not always so sceptical of the stability of man-made things. This perception, she tells us, was caused by the death of her mother and her subsequent rootless childhood, which consisted of 'a dozen different schools' and many nights spent in the back of her father's 'old bakkie' (2011: 30). As a child, Katya 'never did stand steady on the ground beneath [her] feet' and, in spite of hoping otherwise, a sense of unsteadiness has come to characterise her adulthood, too:

Katya always imagined that once you got to settle down, once you had that stack of bricks and mortar, it was solid. She hadn't realised how restless bricks and mortar are; how much effort it takes to keep them from falling down, from wandering off or spilling out in the wrong direction (2011: 30).

One of the results of this consciousness is that Katya has developed an ability to foretell the eventual doom of man-made structures. She knows, for instance, that '[n]o wall is ever silent' but

imbued with an ‘orchestra of knocks and sighs and oceanic rustling’ that serve as ‘the minute harbingers of future destruction, the first tiny tremors of a very, very, slow collapse that will end, decades or centuries from now, in a pile of rubble’ (2011: 91). This acuity is exacerbated by Katya’s line of work – as ‘a pest relocation expert’, she is blessed with a Gothic awareness that ‘there is a world underneath’ spaces that may appear, on their surface, ‘sterile and controlled’ (2011: 197). ‘The lawns of Constantia’ may ‘seem bland and sterile’ and ‘orderly’ to the average onlooker, but not so for Katya, who knows better than anyone ‘where the pockets of anarchy lie in a landscape’ (2011: 143). Cape Town, says Katya, is one such profuse and disorderly place; a Gothic site marked by a hidden underbelly: for her, ‘the roots of the city...do not run deep’ – beneath the city’s ‘surface bustle’ lies an underground world that is ‘alive with a million worms, with buried things’ (2011: 29). Presented through Katya’s vantage point, then, is a vision of Cape Town that is not restricted by its infrastructure and is in contact with its various underworlds. Collapsed, as is Gothic’s trademark, are a series of distinctions – between the urban and its various conventional others, between those distinctions that separate order from chaos; the urban from the natural; the seen from the unseen; the surface from the underneath. Katya’s vision is thus one that seeps across various worlds; it is evocative of the porosity and liminality of the city, and, as such, advances Cape Town as existing outside the lines of striation and stratification. Surfaced in Katya’s perception of the metropole, in other words, is an imagining of Gothic in-between-ness that works to imagine a different kind of post-apartheid city that might give rise to discourses radically different from the ones that currently shape Cape Town. Samara, for example, argues that present-day Cape Town is caught in a web of lingering inequality and division (2011: 4). Stephen Watson argues that such descriptions have to do with Cape Town’s reputation for being, on the one hand, ‘the city of the privileged’ who live ‘close to the city’s mountain chain, its forest slopes and better beaches’ and, on the other, ‘the immense city of the dispossessed and deprived, the apartheid dormitory towns and squatter camps, steadily filling up the waste ground between the city’s mountain backbone and the barrier range of the Hottentot’s Holland’ (2006: 3). For Samara, writing five years after Watson, these divisions continue to saturate the city today – ‘spatially and socially’, says this critic, ‘Cape Town is perhaps the most segregated city in the world’ (2011: 41). Samara asserts that these continuing issues have to do, in particular, with the unequal distribution of wealth in Cape Town; he suggests that divides between economic privilege and deprivation are key to the perpetuation of the contemporary city’s lines of urban partition (2011: 4). To understand the reason for these continuing divisions in the post-apartheid moment, in other words, one must first recognise the various ways in which the neoliberal global order has taken root in the city.

Neoliberalism is of concern for urbanists who study Cape Town because it illustrates the ways in which the city's current machinery is shaped not simply by the country's segregationist legacy, but also by the flows of economic globalisation. Put slightly differently, much of what has formed Cape Town's workings today has to do with the influence of both local and global forces. Salient to this engagement in the contemporary South African moment is that Cape Town's current form of neoliberal governance is failing to reconstruct, and is in fact currently reinstating, the urban segregations that characterised the city's colonial and apartheid histories. Samara's takes this up in his recent study, which argues that 'the divisions of the apartheid era are reproduced and managed...by the contemporary forces of neoliberalism, giving both form and substance to a new inertia of apartness' (2011: 4). According to Samara,

[a] close look at Cape Town reveals how this iteration is generated through a transnational network of neoliberal urban governance in which the local and extra-local combine to produce an approach to governance that is both grounded in the specificity of this city and, at the same time, is an expression of an increasingly generalized form observable in many cities (2011: 4).

Indeed, according to Meg Samuelson, Cape Town's current local ruling party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), 'promote a concentrated form of the neoliberal restructuring of the economy that has been national party policy under the African National Congress since 1996' (2014: 807). As such, some of the trends of the DA's governing policy include the circulation of catchwords like 'choice', 'individual freedoms' and 'open opportunity society' (Samuelson, 2014: 807), while their urban developmental strategy 'hinges on the city's ability to draw investment from around the world' (Samara, 2011: 6). In their efforts to promote Cape Town as a world class city⁶, private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiatives have become positioned by the DA as the keys to innovation and wealth generation, because these industries contribute to raising levels of productivity and are thereby thought (as is typical of the neoliberal agenda) to eventually deliver higher living standards for all. As promoters of this economic theory, the DA's political stance is that urban poverty can be eradicated through what David Harvey terms the 'trickle-down effect' created by deregulation (2005: 66), that is, by free markets and free trade. Thus, the city has fallen 'under the spell of a new form of globalization' (Samuelson, 2014: 808); Cape Town today is operating as a city in the throes of 'a relatively seamless, though far from uncontested, transition in governance from apartheid to neoliberalism' (Samara, 2011: 7).

⁶ Cape Town is currently considered, according to *The Telegraph*, as 'the best city in the world'. One of the reasons for this rating is the 'excellent value for money' that the city offers for tourists – 'where world-class chefs prepare Michelin-rated fare at bargain prices'. Online resource available here: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/citybreaks/11271025/The-worlds-best-cities.html> [accessed 30 July 2015].

One of the consequences of neoliberal policy, as Harvey reminds us, is that issues of fortification and privatisation become newly emphasised. This is because '[n]eoliberals are particularly arduous in seeking the privatization of assets', the result being that matters of 'enclosure and the assignment of private property rights' are held to be primary virtues (Harvey, 2005: 67). Bound up in crime-talk, under the scaffolding of market-led globalisation there develops a newly invigorated war on crime – and many cities across the globe feature, as a result, the construction of islands of security and the roaring expansion of the private crime control industry. These fortified islands are erected, in Gyan Prakash's view, 'by the privileged to wall themselves off from the imagined resentment and violence of the multitude' – suggesting that '[i]nstead of freedom, the unprecedented urbanization of poverty seems to promise only division and conflict' (2010: 1). Prakash's description evokes similar terms employed by Theresa Calderia in her account of the 'closed condominiums' that pervade contemporary São Paulo (2000: 257). These estates, Caldeira writes, are 'a new type of fortified elite housing' in which 'an everyday act ...involves dealing with private guards, identification, classification, iron gates, intercoms, domestic servants, electronic gates, dogs – and a lot of suspicion' (2000: 257). Caldeira suggests that developments such as these share similar characteristics across ostensibly democratising cities: some features include enclaves which 'emphasize the value of what is private and restricted' as well as the tendency 'to be socially homogeneous environments', in that 'the people who inhabit these spaces value living among selected people...and away from the undesired interactions, movement, heterogeneity, danger and the unpredictability of open streets' (2000: 258)⁷.

This fortifying impetus finds expression in *Nineveh's* portrayal of the estate which Katya must clear of infestation. Located on the outskirts of Cape Town, 'somewhere out past Noordhoek, between the new houses and the beach' (2011: 51), Nineveh has been designed to draw as its target market only the city's 'top residents' (2011: 30) – *rich* residents, in other words, looking to settle comfortably into a home located apart from the bustle, heterogeneity and potential dangers of Cape Town's open streets. Nineveh's construction, moreover, was funded by various private and international investors – the reason given for the estate's title is that 'one of the early investors was from the Middle East' (2011: 39)⁸. Caldeira's account of São Paulo as a

⁷ See in this regard the reworking of Cape Town's motto ("This City Works for You") as "This City Works for a Few" by anonymous activist collective Tokoloshe Stencils, in graffiti tags all over the city. Online resource available at: <https://www.facebook.com/tokolosstencils/> [accessed 26 November 2015]

⁸ This might, of course, also be a veiled reference to the Dubai-based consortium responsible for developing the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town as a 'world-class' tourist hub to attract global capital.

‘city of walls’ (2000: 1) anticipates, in many ways, Rose-Innes’s portrayal of Nineveh, which, as a projection of a near-future Cape Town, is similarly secured and fortified. Patrolling Nineveh’s embankments are two security guards, Pascal and Rueben, who live in the shackland that lies at the estate’s peripheries and who are further accompanied by a meaty and vicious guard dog suitably named Soldier. These security measures are additionally reinforced by the estate’s elaborate security system: to enter her unit, which is also the ‘servants quarters’ (2011: 55), Katya must first be coded into a system comprised of a digital identity classification method that grants her access to only certain areas of the development via her fingerprints, making her feel ‘like she was already built into the fabric of the building, long before she got here’ (2011: 55).

Rose-Innes’s rendition of Nineveh gains particular significance when we consider that the estate has also been built on reclaimed land – ‘Katya wonders how much of the wetlands they had to drain, how many thousands of vertebrate or invertebrate souls were displaced or destroyed to make this place’ (2011: 61 - 62). The development’s destructive underpinnings are previously alluded to during Katya’s first visit to Brand Properties – the private company responsible for Nineveh’s development and for Katya’s employment. Arriving at Mr Brand’s floor, located at the top of a building that overlooks the ocean, Katya looks through the window and out over ‘the foreshore’ and sees ‘land stolen from the sea’ (2011: 36). It is while here – in a building with pristine views of the parts of the city that lie on what was once ocean – that Katya is shown a model of Nineveh, an estate with similarly re-possessive origins. And indeed, when Katya views the model, she notices that the manikins are positioned so that they are given the same sea-facing view that she has just taken in: ‘the architect’s manikins stare...through the actual window, onto the vista of the real city beyond’ (2011: 39). Thus, we encounter here a narrative gesture towards Nineveh as a metonymic signifier for Cape Town, an instruction for us to read the estate as a metaphoric template for the city, a place home to only the economic elite, who live ‘contained by walls’ (2011: 38) and on top of the vestiges of environmental degradation. Significantly, it is Nineveh – and therefore also *Cape Town* – which the narrative positions as its focal site for boundary disruption and the subsequent formation of an imagined urban order which shuns fixity in favour of flux.

Disrupting (B)orders/Invoking Underneath

Like those denizens who inhabit *Nineveh*’s non-fictive counterpart, Rose-Innes’s protagonist clearly lives within the markers of a fortified, bordered and therefore *contained* city. But Rose-Innes ultimately writes against the permanence of these borders – and she does so by employing the energies of the Gothic to challenge the solidity of the city’s seemingly impenetrable and

foreclosed state. Salient to this subversive potential is the emphasis that *Nineveh* places on the relation between temporalities, suggesting – with characteristic Gothic flair – that to decode Cape Town as it appears today, we must trace the city's roots and look to its past. Such a temporal entanglement is patent in one of the narrative's opening scenes, which features Katya in Newlands Forest, looking to free a box of caterpillars that she is relocating from their original Constantia home 'back into the wild' (2011: 19). Katya arrives at a suitable tree for this "liberation", only to discover that the tree is 'a wild almond, the same species Jan Van Riebeeck used for his famous hedge, meant to keep the Khoisan out of the Dutch settlement' (2011: 22). Van Riebeeck's bitter almond hedge was planted in early 1660 and marks, according to Samuelson, 'a division that still cuts across the urban landscape of Cape Town today, separating the southern suburbs, city bowl and sea-facing properties from the impoverished Cape Flats' (2014: 806). Thus, fact finds its fictional mirror-image in *Nineveh*'s pages when Katya makes contact with the wild almond tree – touching 'a hard, furred seedpod' (2011: 22). In this moment, the distinction between past and present collapse and a parallel is drawn between the city's colonial heritage and Katya's current vocation, which equally involves a process of 'policing borders' (2011: 19). Much of Katya's work, after all, consists of a kind of neo-colonial perpetuation of the city's stratified status quo – in that her business is built on the removal of creatures that 'have wandered from their proper zones' (2011: 19).

Another of the narrative's temporal overlays is actualised through the figure of Katya's unruly father, Len Grubbs. Like Katya, Len also works in the pest control business, and also like Katya, had been employed by Mr Brand to expunge *Nineveh* of its unwelcome bugs, but he has subsequently been fired because he 'fucked around' (2011: 17). Everything about Len suggests that he possesses a rather rough edge: Katya describes him, for example, as a 'lifelong vermin man' (2011: 20) – a label that foreshadows Len as a *vermin-man* himself, that is, a man who burrows through *Nineveh*'s foundations. But this description also signals Len's stance on pest control, which encompasses the use of 'hand-to-hand-combat', 'various poison', and 'a range of implements fitted with blades and weights and protruding nails' (2011: 77). Seeking to distance herself from Len – and therefore from her violent past – Katya 'does not destroy'; 'her niche' is that 'she will relocate' (2011: 19). This liberal agenda – 'a strictly no-kill policy...concerned with rescue and cleansing' (2011: 20) – often bleeds, however, into an obsession with control and sterility; with what Katya terms 'clip[ping] things into obedience' (2011: 20). It is through this father-daughter relationship, then, that a further Gothic doubling is animated in the narrative between past and present: while Katya's business may be less violent in its approach when placed in relation to Len's vocation of extermination, it culminates, too, in the perpetuation of the

borders. Put slightly differently, and invoking a more allegorical line, both the liberal solution, along with solutions that rely on the practice of violence, ultimately achieve similar ends – they bolster the policed and fortified world.

Yet, these border-building systems are shown to be flawed and much more porous than they may at first appear. Whilst Katya is living in Nineveh, cracks start to show in the development's foundations – both literally and figuratively – as she discovers that the estate's boundaries have been corroded by her father months before. Len has been entering the development through an underground passage that he has created in order to smuggle in insect larvae in the hopes that he will be re-hired by Mr Brand once the beetles begin to swarm. In the interim, he has been pillaging Nineveh of its various furnishings – extracting through the tunnel a variety of building materials such as tiles, furniture, piping and so on. These materials are being purchased by the residents who live in the shacks at the estate's frontiers, who are either selling them in turn, or making use of the materials themselves to refurbish their homes. Katya stumbles upon 'the cavity beneath the structure' whilst trying to locate Nineveh's mysterious source of infestation – a discovery that she finds disorienting: 'The floor' she says, 'seems less firm beneath her feet. Everything sways' (2011: 109). Disorientating though they may be, these breached borders are ultimately positioned as the narrative's focal sites of potentiality and power given that they are what leads to the break down and subsequent re-knitting of Nineveh. As such, Nineveh's underground tunnel animates what Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall describe as 'one of the characteristic features of the African metropolis': 'an underneath' or 'underground' in which 'are embedded other orders of visibility, other scripts, that are not reducible to the built form' (2008: 22). So, too, is the case here, where Nineveh is rendered *breachable* in spite of its apparent seamlessness – 'this place' says Katya, 'is not as impermeable as she had thought'; there 'are channels, trade routes out and in' (2011: 110). In its invocation of this underground the novel draws a further alignment, then, with Gothic themes of subversion: through her destabilisation of Nineveh's apparent durability, Rose-Innes shows us that dissent – *that ways in and against* – remain possible in spite of systems which seem, on their surface, foreclosed and permanent.

The subversion potential embedded within the permeable border is further evoked in *Nineveh's* rendering of the unit that lies below Katya's own – a Gothic doubling of Unit Two that Len has made his home. Katya enters this dark, dank and overgrown place, and the 'first thing she notices is the smell...the smell of living things' and 'intimately linked to the smell is a sense of indefinable disorder. Chaos hangs in the air like a shout' (2011: 163). This room would normally be identical – sterile and ordered – to Katya's own, but thanks to Len's various efforts, what

Katya ‘sees is a strange duplicate of Unit Two, one existing in some degraded alternative world’ (2011: 163). The unit’s fixtures ‘have all been pillaged’; there is ‘mud on the floor, silted in thin ribbons and piled in the corners’ and between these muddy sections grow large ‘patches of moss’ (2011: 163). Gothic site par excellence, this ruined room is ‘[a]n in-between place, *where things overlap*, where the vlei steps inside and the indoor world escapes into the wild’ (2011: 163, italics my own). This, in other words, is a liminal and disordered world, where dichotomies are powerfully destabilised – a ‘middle world’ (2011: 164) as Katya puts it, in which marriages between nature and culture, surface and underneath, order and chaos are consummated. What is more, the room is also the site for two-way trade: the beetles have been making use of the unit as ‘their portal’ into Nineveh, while Len has been employing it as ‘a warehouse [...] containing the stripped-out ornaments and accoutrements of Nineveh’ (2011: 164). Thus, Unit Two is host to both an infiltration and an extraction – to a method of ‘import/export’; ‘[b]eetles in, building materials out... it’s the kind of breaching of boundaries that someone like Mr Brand could not be expected to imagine, or anticipate, or guard against’ (2011: 164).

This Gothic location is thus invoked as an emblem to be brought against systems of ‘order and symmetry’ – typified in the figure of Mr Brand, whose name not only encodes a celebration of commodification, but whose outlook is also characterised by ‘a belief in the fixed nature of things’ (2011: 188). It is this mode of perceiving the world that ‘gives [Mr Brand] a certain disadvantage’; as Katya sees him,

Mr Brand, for all his solid confidence, in fact because of it, cannot look past the obvious, cannot see past the evidence of the concrete world. He can’t consider that...the floorboard might conceal strange depths...It would not occur to him that walls are breachable. In Mr Brand’s world of certainties, such an in-between place is hardly possible; it barely exists’ (2011: 188).

Mr Brand conforms, then, to a philosophy that presents things as fixed and stable – as coded in permanent and unyielding terms. These codes are brought to their ruin when Nineveh’s foundations begin to crumble – as the beetles rise up from the depths of the earth, in a spectacularly Gothic climax, and swarm Nineveh. However, this process is not one that culminates in Nineveh’s destruction; rather it is what leads to the development’s transformation as it begins to take on new form: ‘the world’, Katya tells us, ‘is moving, leaving, driven without pause...Nineveh is breathing, flexing in a complex new rhythm that is alien to her...its whole surface [is] alive with tiny creatures, stirring, swarming’ (2011: 173 - 176). As such, Nineveh’s undoing becomes the site, not for erasure or termination, but for non-apocalyptic visions that look to present change as the gateway to newness, to potential forms of re-worlding – notably

expressed at the novel's climax, which depicts Katya watching 'as the substance of Nineveh unravels, knitting *new patterns*, weaving Nineveh into the shacks and the city beyond' (2011: 193, emphasis mine).

The value and implication of *Nineveh's* climax becomes particularly apparent when we place it in dialogue with the trajectory of Gothic writings written during the late apartheid period, which were marked, like de Wet's 'African Gothic' by themes of 'curtailment' and a 'closing down of prospects' (Boehmer, 1998: 44). 'What a reader picks up [in fiction from] the late phase of apartheid', says Boehmer, 'is a suspension of vision, a hemming in as opposed to a convinced and convincing opening up' (1998: 44). This idea is raised symbolically in de Wet's 'African Gothic' through her rendition of the play's ending, which portrays her title characters as permanently suspended in their past, unable to imagine the future – raised symbolically as the unattainable location that lies beyond the farmhouse gate. Characterised by a sense of 'suspension' and 'a hawing', 'African Gothic' is exemplary of a common theme noted by Boehmer in late apartheid fiction – namely, an interest in conclusions that shut 'down on tomorrow' (1998: 45). Boehmer concludes, however, by looking hopefully to the fictions of the post-apartheid moment to unsettle and reformulate this literary tradition of sedentary endings: 'now that freedom has made new kinds of formal and cultural daring more possible', Boehmer's hope is that post-apartheid literature might find 'new ways of representing the world' that are 'visionary, hallucinatory, dislocating' (1998: 53). *Nineveh* can be understood, in this vein, as actively engaging with this national discourse and literary history – through its animation of change as a process that 'we should not fear' but 'embrace'⁹. This is a post-apartheid text that takes up Boehmer's call, in other words, by refusing the logic of catastrophe – a presentation of the world that takes as its focus 'end without revelation' (Williams, 2010: 4). My thought here is that *Nineveh's* intervention in the South African literary tradition is that it places change and mobility at the heart of its thinking about the future of post-apartheid Cape Town – and thus draws into being a fictional imagining of prospective modes of urban belonging that favour a process of opening up rather over a process of shutting down; that favour the breaking of borders over a process of fencing in.

Conclusion: Becoming-Insect and the Body as Menagerie

Let us take, as a way of concluding, *Nineveh's* nomadic conclusion, which features Katya's own subjection to these processes of 'becoming' – 'becoming' understood here as the practice of

⁹ Online resource available at: <http://africasacountry.com/2012/04/south-african-write-henrietta-rose-inness-nineveh/> [accessed on August 18 2015]

‘unfolding outward’ (Braidotti, 2011: 109). This concept, formulated by Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Theory* (2011), is borrowed from French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who formulate a ‘becoming’ as ‘a dissolution of form that connects the most diverse longitudes and latitudes, the most varied speeds and slownesses, which guarantees a continuum by stretching variation far beyond its formal limits’ (1987: 309). Becoming, in other words, can be understood as a site of ‘multiplicity’ and ‘co-existence’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 243); it is, as Braidotti suggests, a place of metamorphosis characterised by a turning outwards as opposed to a turning inwards, and is thus what enables ‘an unfolding outward of the specific world one inhabits’ (2011: 109). But, central to becoming’s configuration is the notion of *contact and connection* – ‘it is a location’, as Braidotti suggests, ‘that needs to be constructed together with, that is to say, in the encounter with others’ (2011: 35). This process is thus a fundamentally relational one and necessarily pushes ‘the subject to his/her limits’, since becoming can only be experienced ‘in a constant encounter with externally different others’ (Braidott, 2011: 35). Put slightly differently, becoming takes as its foundation the notion that ‘to be one’, to borrow from Donna Haraway, ‘is always to *become with many*’ (2008: 4, italics in original).

Katya’s own becoming takes place at *Nineveh*’s close, after she returns to now-ruinous Nineveh, which has become inhabited by a series of people from the near-by shanty-town: ‘there’s coloured cloth in the windows’ and ‘a line of washing has been suspended between two buildings’ (2011: 199 - 200). Change has taken place for Katya as well, who has ‘lost faith’, she tell us, ‘in this job. This fruitless work of trying to keep things in their proper places’ (2011: 207). Thus, Katya gives up her economic role – a role that codes her, significantly, as a patroller of borders – and returns to the nomadic state that had marked a childhood spent ‘sleeping in her dad’s bakkie’, a rootlessness that has now become a comfort to her; ‘a lullaby of sorts’ (2011: 206). Along with giving up Painless Pest Relocations, Katya has also surrendered her home, that which assigns her a sedentary position, to her father, who now shares the house with Derek, a local homeless man whom he has befriended. Here, then, is the novel’s theme of porosity fully realised: through Katya’s unleashing of the ties that had bound her at the novel’s onset. And so, no longer tied to ‘a permanent address’ nor a ‘particular place’, Katya now simply ‘drives and drives’ – feeling, as she does, ‘like a ball of string unravelling, always connected, but lighter the further she goes’ (2011: 205).

But these points of connection are extended further still: not only does *Nineveh* conclude by depicting Katya as released from her ties to her home and business, but the narrative also portrays her as being released from her species-being. Having driven out to one of the city’s viewpoints, Katya looks out over Cape Town and imagines below her a city unable to

‘keep the shape of things’ because ‘everything is in motion, changed and changing’ – an imagining that she extends over her own body: ‘even human skin’, she says, ‘is *porous* and infested, every second letting microscopic creatures in and out. Our own bodies are menageries’ (2011: 207, italics mine). Katya here ceases to conceive of her body in terms of its limits as she envisions her skin losing its enclosed shape to become, instead, a sieve-like epidermis that is the assemblage point between self and other. Thus does Katya emerge, at the narrative’s close, as a metaphorical figure for the processes that she had at first attempted ‘with her bags and nets and boxes’ (2011: 207) to contain and control – a transformation that we might describe, in a borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, as Katya’s ‘becoming-insect’: her movement from a folding inwards to a *unfolding outwards* as she takes on the characteristics of migration and metamorphosis that are representative of the insect “pests” that she had originally tried to clip ‘into obedience’ (2011:). Put in Judith Butler’s terms, Katya’s skin, that which ‘was once thought of as a border, that which delimits and bounds’ emerges instead as a menagerie – as ‘*a highly populated site*’ (2004: 49, italics my own).

But crucial to Katya’s becoming-insect is that it is activated through a script that places value on connection, contact and interaction between self and other; in her porous flesh we encounter reference to the same modes of ‘co-existence’ to which we have seen Deleuze and Guattari refer (1987: 243). Katya’s body thus emerges as an enfleshed site of Gothic subversion, in the sense that it performs a collapse of the distinctions that separate inside from outside, human from the non-human, self from other. This Gothic corporality is therefore one which stands in direct contrast to the markers of foreclosure and containment that characterise, as Samara has informed us, post-apartheid Cape Town – a city ‘more fortified’ (Samuelson: 2014: 807) and ‘segregated’ than ever before as ‘inequality within the city deepens...under conditions of neoliberalism’ (Samara, 2010: 41). What makes *Nineveh* unique is that it is ultimately a narrative that seeks, like its protagonist, to destabilise a number of ‘dominant representations’ (Braidotti, 2011: 39) through its Gothic investment in the porosity of boundaries, a convention that Rose-Innes employs as a means of envisioning Cape Town, to invoke Samuelson, as a city that exists ‘*beyond the border*’ (2007: 247). Such an imagining, I want to suggest, not only allows for the ascendance of more complex visions of the city and its futures, but could also help us shape more ethical behaviours that take as their point of reference not ‘the individual’, which neoliberalism seeks to emphasise at every turn, but rather what Braidotti terms ‘*the relation*’: a mode of being in the world that emphasises ‘openness to others, in the positive sense of affecting and being affected by others’ (2011: 304). My thought here is that *Nineveh*’s imagining of Katya’s porous flesh as *threshold* – letting things ‘out and in’ – can help us find ways of placing

an ethical stance towards others at the heart of our thinking, a stance that ‘allows us to encounter one another’ and account for ‘more fundamental modes of dependency that bind us’ (Butler, 2004: 49) even as the individualising, border-building effects of neoliberalism take root, as Boehmer describes them, ‘everywhere’ as these become ‘all-invasive, all-consuming’ (2004: 13). Gothic, as it is being implemented in *Nineveh*’s pages might help us, in other words, reveal these divisionary effects more effectively and, through its emphasis on boundary disruption, pose a challenge to the hegemonic discourses of free market, neoliberal ideologies – and open us to a deeper sense of contact between self and (an)other.

Lagos Enchanted: Monsters, Mermaids and Magic in *Lagoon*

Lagos, the city where nothing works but everything happens.

- Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon*, 2014

Lagoon, by Nnedi Okorafor, presents another Gothic hallmark: the monstrous or the alien. This novel is set in contemporary Lagos and utilises the monster-figure as its central metaphor for the breakdown of the African city's urban binaries and the subsequent reconstruction of Lagos's social and environmental fabric. In this novel, the monster takes the form of a magical alien that walks out of the ocean one day, and onto the shores of Lagos's Bar Beach, and thereafter effects a series of transformations in the metropole. This Gothic creature, as we shall see, not only reconstitutes the social inequities of Lagos, but it is also what causes the renewal of the city's ecological components. Significant to this novel, and thus to my analysis as well, is that the figure of the monster is positioned by Okorafor as a site of hope for the future – both global and local.

The monster is evocative for my analysis because this figure refuses, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen asserts, 'to participate in the classificatory "order of things"' (1996: 6). According to Cohen,

monsters are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration [...] the monster is a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions. Because of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes – as that which questions binary thinking (1996: 6).

The monster, in other words, is a useful fictional tool because it renders legible the collapse of ontological distinctions, and thereby functions as a means by which to challenge the stability of dominant world-codings. Such is certainly the case in *Lagoon*: in this narrative, the monster-figure takes the form of a group of aliens that emerge one day from Lagosian shores and thereafter challenge the metropole's inhabitants to reflect on and unhinge Lagos's biosocial dichotomies. Thus, Okorafor looks to the figure of the monstrous-alien to express her vision for the emergence of a Lagosian future – one that is eco-conscious, sustainable, and constituted by a series of human and non-human interdependencies.

Such a biophilic emphasis on fostering ties between human and environment is a noticeable trend in all of Okorafor's work. Alice Curry, for example, argues that Okorafor's texts explicitly reject a dichotomy between humans and nature in favour of a fictional landscape that

presents ‘the organic...as the bedrock of the human imaginary’; ‘the nurturing soil of human potential rather than a separate entity or category to be labelled the environment’ (2014: 38). Okorafor’s writings, asserts Curry, are ‘*entirely* bound up in the natural world’, and consequently model ‘a mode of being-in-the-world that successfully deconstructs the human-environment, nature-culture dichotomy’ (2014: 38). *Lagoon* forms part of such an oeuvre, which Okorafor defines as her project of creating ‘organic fantasy’ (2009: 277). This fictional form, says Okorafor, is born from her ‘complex African experience’, which she expresses as ‘a series of cultural mixes and clashes between being American and being Nigerian’ (2009: 277). Her fiction is generated, then, from this composite place – from the ‘friction of [her] cultures’, specifically her Igbo heritage, in which ‘ghosts, demons, fairies and spirits mix with the mundane’ (Okorafor, 2009: 277 - 278). Okorafor selects these fantastic elements from her Igbo background and manipulates these in the creation of her fictions: she ‘grow[s] fantasy from reality’; ‘organic fantasy’ as Okorafor puts it, ‘blooms directly from the soil of the real’ (2009: 278, 280).

The organic fantasy label offers, in other words, an alternative on what has elsewhere been termed “magical realism”. This categorical term, according to Brenda Cooper, is one that many ‘African writers tend to reject’ because it ‘implies the slavish imitation of Latin American narratives’ and thereby a ‘denial of local knowledge and beliefs, language, and rhetoric; it seems to perpetuate imperialist notions that nothing new, intellectually or spiritually, originated in Africa’ (2003: 460). Harry Garuba, in his formulation of ‘animist materialism’, similarly finds the term inefficient. He suggests that the category of magical realism cannot fully account for either ‘the scope’ or ‘the multiplicity of representational practices that animism authorizes’ (2003: 272). The reason for this, argues Garuba, is that animist strategies involve the *materialisation* of abstractions, of what he terms ‘giving a concrete dimension to abstract ideas’, and are therefore not to be confused or aligned with the devices of ‘irony’ ‘repetition and difference’ (2003: 274) upon which magical realism depends. Irony, as Cooper suggests, is indeed central to magical realist texts, as these narratives often present the reader with a tension between ‘the points of view of an indigenous peasant class’, which are often steeped in magical thinking, and those of ‘ordinary people...who have a far more thoroughgoing Western experience and who look upon the culture’s uneven development with self-knowledge and some distance’ (2003: 460).

Lagoon features none of this ironic distance. In fact, central to the construction of this text is not a ‘tension’ between oppositional views as observed above, but a mythological merging with dead and living, earthly and spiritual, visible and invisible, city and sea. This merging is of the kind remarked upon by Cote d’Ivoire author, Veronique Tadjou, who describes much West-African writing as underpinned by ‘the belief in vital forces animating all earthly creations, alive

or dead' since this is a principle that 'occupies an important place in West African cultures' (2013: 1). Okorafor's *Lagoon* emerges out of such an animist mould. The narrative charts the stories of three main protagonists, Adaora (a local marine-biologist), Anthony (a Ghanaian rapper) and Agu (a Nigerian soldier), who together witness the arrival of a group of extraterrestrials one evening from the ocean-waters that lap against Lagos's Bar Beach. After their watery ascendance, the creatures enter Lagos and subsequently catalyse a disruption of the city's status quo: as the presence of the aliens infiltrates Nigeria's economic capital, the city and its mythological others meet and merge to form a unique urban environment of entropy and enchantment. The narrative voice continually shifts through multiple points of view in order to provide the reader with a more nuanced and variegated perspective of this disruption: after having seen the aliens arrive, the soldier Agu finds that 'there is more to this city than [he had] imagined': 'there are other things inhabiting Lagos besides carbon-based creatures. There are greater beings of the earth, soil, sea, lagoon and land' (2014: 120, 168). Indeed, Lagos is not only home to a host of magical and mythical beings, but also to stories and their spiritual afterlives – dormant narratives that lie nestled 'in the mud, the earth, in the fond memory of the soily cosmos'; 'in the always mingling of past, present and future'; 'in the water' and 'in the powerful spirits and ancestors who dwell in Lagos' (2014: 194).

With the emergence of the aliens, these hidden narratives begin to surface and assemble with the land of the living; what we witness is a subsequent merging of the city's invisible and visible elements. Produced from this Gothic crucible, as this chapter will show, is a fictional image of Lagos wherein the city and its ecological and spiritual underworld are grafted onto one another, resulting in a variety of mythical, environmental and social entanglements that shun, similarly to Rose-Innes's *Nineveh*, apocalyptic conclusions in favour of a more hopeful future-rendering of an ecologically sustainable African city. *Lagoon's* form of futurism is thus one which seeks, at every turn, to reorient the human mind in the direction of the natural world. It is from such an account of the city, dizzying as it is with a patchwork of connections between sea and city, old and new, local and global, magic and modern, human and non-human, that *Lagoon* looks to realise the potential birthing of a new world order.

Monstrosity and the Ecologies of Land and Sea

Lagoon, it should be noted, was developed as a response to the controversial South African film *District 9*¹. This film opens, similarly, with a scene depicting the arrival of aliens in the African city – in this instance, Johannesburg – after their UFO breaks down and they are consequently

¹ See Okorafor, N. 2014 'Author's Note', *Lagoon*. New York: Hodder and Stoughton.

forced to move into Johannesburg, only to be made subject to a history of violence and segregation when they are placed by their human counterparts in a location situated far from the urban centre. ‘Alienness’, as Jennifer Wenzel asserts, is portrayed in the film

as a form of radical yet uncannily familiar abject alterity that simultaneously evokes the radical division of the apartheid past and the contemporary ethnic/national tensions of the new intra-African diaspora, where planetary “aliens” become a figure for undocumented African migrants (2010: 131).

One of the central political dimensions suffusing *District 9*, in other words, is the contemporary continuation of South African segregation along xenophobic lines – a perpetuation which the film both anxiously critiques and problematically performs in turn. This concerns the film’s negative portrayal of a group of Nigerians who live alongside the aliens in their urban squatter camp. Here, the Nigerians fall prey to all sorts of stereotypes: the film depicts them as running an underground syndicate selling drugs, alcohol and cat food at outlandish prices to the aliens. The head of this gang, a formidable man named Obesandjo, is the site for the worst of these negativities: to make himself powerful, Obesandjo kills and consumes his alien-neighbours; enacting what are essentially acts of cannibalism and therefore a ‘throwback’, as Michael Valdez Moses notes, ‘to the negative colonial stereotypes of the “primitive” African’ (2010: 159). *District 9* concludes after the body of its protagonist, Wikus van der Merwe, has come into contact with a foreign substance and thereafter undergone a full transition from human to non-human – its final image is of an alien-Wikus sitting amidst a dystopic no-man’s land, shaping flowers out of the scrap metal that constitutes his new shackland home.

Okorafor writes against *District 9* in a series of ways. This concerns not only her rejection of dystopic themes, but also her portrayal of the motivation for the arrival of the aliens in Lagos. In *Lagoon*, these creatures enter the city on their own terms and for reasons to do with the specificity of the metropole and its enjoining marine-life: ‘we have chosen’ says one of the aliens, ‘to live *here*...in Lagos and the water’ (2014: 40). It is here, however, that *Lagoon* aligns with *District 9* – since it explicitly asks the reader, as the film asks of its audience, to imagine *the importance of place*. Adaora tells us, for example, that she

was beginning to see why [the aliens] had chosen the city of Lagos. If they’d landed in New York, Tokyo or London, the governments of these places would quickly have swooped in to hide, isolate and study the aliens. In Lagos, there was no such order (2014: 64).

Throughout *Lagoon*, we are reminded of the uniqueness of Lagos – chaos and a lack of order are offered, indeed, as one of the metropolis’s defining characteristics: ‘If there’s one city that

rhymes with “chaos”, says Adaora, ‘it is Lagos’ (2014: 214). The city’s disorder is not the only factor that renders Lagos inimitable, however. George Packer attests that Lagos is the fastest growing city in the world: ‘by 2015, it is projected [that] Lagos will rank third behind Tokyo and Bombay, with twenty-three million inhabitants’². For Packer, this city currently serves as an icon for the latest global trends: ‘a megalopolis’, as he puts it, ‘of the future’³. Packer’s descriptions evoke similar lines employed by Rem Koolhaas, who has posited Lagos as a ‘working’ city – this in spite of what he describes as both the ‘apocalyptic violence’ permeating the metropole’s streets and Lagos’s reputation for being a ‘chaotic city’ (2002: 177). Between the city’s ‘tragic manifestations of degraded urban life’, says Koolhaas, are in fact ‘intensely emancipatory zones’, which include a series of complex organisational networks (2002: 177). Thus, Koolhaas shares Packer’s views of the city as flagging the future of global urbanisation: ‘Lagos’, he writes, ‘is at the vanguard of globalising modernity’ (2002: 177). Following these critics, one of the reasons for Lagos’ uniqueness can be attributed to the particular temporal vision that the city performs – by way of its *futuristic present*.

We will return to these descriptions in more detail later, but for now it suffices to say that Lagos’s futuristic features lend themselves to many a sci-fi plot – traits of which we clearly encounter in *Lagoon*. Salient to *Lagoon*, however, is that the local *precedes* the global and not the other way around. Put slightly differently, it is Lagos’s futuristic markers that find a reverberation with global fictional tropes, and thereby appeal to this narrative’s (re)construction of local content. Okorafor draws, in other words, on international narrative modes – such as the Gothic monster or the alien from science fiction – and maps these onto her depiction of the local African city, rendering hers a narrative that draws from global genre and reanimates this in a local form. What is achieved in *Lagoon* is thus a hybrid encounter between the global form and West-African traditions, an appropriate form, given the novel’s thematic focus on hybridity – ‘the condition of being between multiple, often opposing, cultural identities and influences’ (Mafe, 2012: 22). Various aspects of such a shaping are related in *Lagoon*, but perhaps most significant among these is Okorafor’s opening scene, which resists global science-fiction tropes and instead draws on West-African mythological narratives to describe the arrival of the aliens in

² Online resource available here: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/13/the-megacity>. [Accessed: 3 September 2015]

³ Online resource available here: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/13/the-megacity>. [Accessed: 3 September 2015]

Lagos. The scene is relayed to us through the eyes of a boy standing on the shores of Bar Beach, watching as the first of the extra-terrestrials emerge:

as it walked out of the water ...he knew it wasn't human. All his mind would register was the word "smoke". At least until the creature walked up the quiet beach and stepped into the flickering lights from one of the restaurants. By then it had become a naked dark-skinned African woman with long black braids...Then the strange woman creature silently ran back to the water and dove in like Mami Wata (2014: 13).

Notable here is the comparison of the alien to Mami Wata, a West-African mythological figure. Mami Wata is a water-deity, whose body is said to comprise the torso of a beautiful black woman with long black braids and the tail of a colourful fish. An African mermaid, Mami Wata is often depicted (in painting and sculpture) with a snake slung across her shoulders or spread over her bare breasts. For some, Mami Wata represents help in economic issues – 'she bestows good fortune', says Henry Drewal, 'through monetary wealth' – while for others, Mami Wata aids in matters of fertility and procreation (Drewal, 2008: 1). Associated with this divinity are also her siren-like qualities: that is, Mami Wata's irresistible powers of seduction. According to Drewal, many desire a meeting with this water-spirit in order to commence on a love affair with her; it is believed that Mami Wata 'literally creates "*wet* dreams"' (2008: 1). To undertake such a liaison, however, is to plunge oneself into dangerous waters indeed, for a coupling with Mami Wata often requires a substantial sacrifice, such as the life of a family member or lifelong devotion and celibacy.

Amongst these mythical undertones we might notice a further point of importance: Mami Wata is a *hybrid* creature – her body is made up of two different species⁴, fish and human, and thus inhabits two different ecological realms, one of water and the other of land. Indeed, as Drewal argues, it is Mami Wata's

trans-ness that helps to explain her power and presence. She is compelling because she transgresses boundaries; she embodies the qualities of "mixed-origins". In her manifestation as mermaid, Mami Wata is at once human and fish, air-breathing and water-dwelling; she is fish, yet not fish; human, yet not human (2008: 2, *italic mine*).

It is significant, then, that *Lagoon's* portrayal of the alien is modelled upon this transgressive creature, who lives on the threshold of existence, and in whose body the boundaries between

⁴ See Drewal, H. 2008. 'Introduction: Charting the journey', *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora*. (ed.) Drewal, H. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

human and non-human are dismantled. Tellingly, Okorafor's 'woman creature' (2014: 7) emerges at Lagos's Bar Beach – a location which Adaora describes as 'the perfect sample of Nigerian society [because it is] a place of *mixing* [where] the ocean mixed with the land and the wealthy with the poor' (2014: 7, italics mine). Within this alien-figure, too, lies a fundamental mixing: encoded within the alien is an incorporation of the new with the known; while she is undeniably resonant with existing West-African mythological narratives, the alien is also very clearly *alien* and therefore new: she is referred to, for example, 'as coming from your outer heavens, beyond' (2014: 37). This alien-figure is thus local and global simultaneously and, as such, convenes the various local/translocal interfaces which sculpt *Lagoon's* narrative. The global device of monstrosity or alien-ness, is adapted here, then, through the narrative's performance of West-African myths. Joyce Nyairo offers us a useful formulation for such a process by arguing that African cultural formations are best understood as constituted by an 'acquisitive blend of continuity, appropriation and modification' (2007: 147). This blend, writes Nyairo, 'is not some simple combination of "traditional" with global texts', but rather a gesture to 'the markers of the foreign that simultaneously appeal to reworked constructions of traditional values and practices' (2007: 131). Okorafor's figure of the monster emerges, then, as a multifocal, hybrid symbol that speaks in multiple registers and which generates, rather than limits, many different meanings and significances.

This concept of hybridity is a particularly significant one – since it is what shapes not only *Lagoon's* depiction of the aliens, but what leads to the environmental restoration of Lagos. It is, after all, from the littoral parts of Lagos that the creatures emerge – from the hybrid shores of Bar Beach, a place where classes of rich and poor converge and where the elements of water and land meet. The origins of the creatures are left decidedly murky (we are not told exactly where the aliens come from, but left with only a vague indication that they are not from "here"), but it is made explicit that they bear the ability to transform at will, and as needed. 'We are change' is the constant refrain that the aliens offer when Adaora asks as to what constitutes their corporeality; 'we take in matter [...] What we can find. Dust, stone, metal elements. We alter whatever substance we find to suit us' (2014: 38 - 39). It is these fluid creatures – figures that move between the states of solidity and vapour – that instigate the dawning of a new epoch of ecological renewal. We are told, for example, that with the emergence of the creatures, 'the ocean water just outside Lagos, Nigeria, is now more clean and alive than it has been in centuries' – this 'despite the FPSO Mystra's loading hose leaking crude oil [into the sea]' (2014: 6). Under the ocean's surface has formed a 'thriving coral community' (2014: 53) never before seen along Lagosian shores; the water has become so 'sweet and clear' that it has drowned out the sea's 'foul

blackness' (2014: 5). Before the aliens arrived, says Adaora, 'the oceans were ailing from pollution. Today, as the sun rises, there may as well be a sign on all Lagos beaches that reads: "Here There be Monsters". This has always been the truth, but today it is truer' (2014: 228).

Indeed, from this moment onwards, monsters emerge from all corners of the city as the boundaries between the human and the extra-human begin to crumble. What the creatures also surface, then, are various latent – or invisible – elements of Lagos, which subsequently awaken and meet with the land of the urbanites. Among those who are subject to these awakenings is Adaora, who is suspected from childhood of being a 'marine witch' – because she was born 'with webbed feet and hands [and] legs that were joined together by flesh' (2014: 257). But the story of her birth has remained a secret, since her father 'said that if it were the old days, they would have thrown me in the bush' (2014: 257). After coming into contact with the aliens, Adaora enters the sea and finds that she has indeed been harbouring dormant power within herself: as she is engulfed in a wave 'that looked like the hand of a powerful water spirit' (2014: 13), her body morphs into a monstrous version of her original form, in which 'something old' is combined with 'something new' (2014: 255). Along her neck grow gills 'like several numb hairy flaps of skin', and her legs cease to be her legs – '[they] had become the body of a giant metallic blue fish...Adaora was...half fish and half human' (2014: 251 - 263). As a result of this transformation, Adaora wonders whether her hybrid body is in fact new at all: 'maybe', she tells us, 'it's always been there. Beneath the surface' (2014: 258). Thus, a parallel is drawn between the corporeality of the aliens and Adaora's altered body, which similarly performs a combination of newness with oldness – and also like the aliens, she bears an uncanny resemblance to Mami Wata, the West African deity of mermaid shape. Furthermore, as with the ecologically emancipatory potential that is projected through the figure of the extra-humans, it is once Adaora has crossed the threshold between human and environment that she, too, is imbued with ecological power. Along with her transformation, Adaora possesses the ability to harness and shape water: 'she spread her hands on the water's surface. It felt warm and solid. She pushed and felt something emanate from herself...Adaora's invisible force' (2014: 243).

Adaora uses this force, hereafter, to foster a sustainment and protection of the sea-life upon which Lagos depends. As the novel concludes, Adaora tells us that she has begun to draw on 'the knowing' that comes with 'being a marine witch' and that 'aman Iman' has consequently become her mantra – 'aman Iman...*water is life*' (2014: 250 & 280). Thus, Adaora's gaze (and therefore ours as well) is re-orientated from the land to the sea as the dichotomy between her human body and its environmental other is collapsed. Encoded, in other words, in Adaora's interspecies corporeality is a mediation between two different states – aquatic and urban – and a

subsequent fostering of a relational dependency among these two worlds. Her unstable body looks to account, then, for a more sustainable means of living in the coastal city; for a form of urban existence that acknowledges a human dependence on nature: ‘the cure for anything’, says Adaora, ‘is salt water – sweat, tears or the sea’ (2014: 2). Adaora’s transformation – or rebirth if you so prefer – can thus be read as articulating a rejection of the conceptual schemata that places the environmental realm in opposition to the human world and thereby realigns her with the ocean in an inter-subjective, empathetic relationship. Through Adaora, *Lagoon* makes a claim for a form of ‘blue urbanism’, to borrow from Timothy Beatley, that looks to shape city-futures that ‘fuse the urban with the blue’; that ‘connect urbanites, literally and emotionally, with the oceans around them’ (2014: 156 – 157). Such a call for a synthesis between the urban and the ocean, for *blue living*, is further encapsulated in *Lagoon*’s title, which is the English translation of Lagos – the name given to the city by the Portuguese upon their arrival in 1472. The novel’s title serves, in this way, to both signal Lagos’ colonial heritage and to evoke Lagos as a city infused and configured by its relation to the ocean, and to reflect on the various ecological erasures caused by rapid urbanisation, which the novel looks to rectify by drawing into focus, through Adaora’s monstrous transformation, that *water is life* – and thus makes a claim for an environmental form of engagement that registers this land-sea dependency.

Magic, Modernity and the Economy of the Occult

This is a narrative, then, which places particular value on the city’s supernatural elements – on those aspects of Lagos that fall *beyond* the material-realm and which have remained latent, hidden beneath the surface, until they are later released by the arrival of the extra-humans. As we have seen, this value is frequently realised in *Lagoon* by way of an investment in hybrid creatures, whose bodies slip ‘hither and thither’ (Bhabha, 1994: 4) and thus introduce a rupturing of the oppositional schema that looks to separate the human realm from its non-human counterpart. This rupturing of binaries is further actualised through *Lagoon*’s portrayal of modernity’s more magical side.

An example of this can be found in *Lagoon*’s depiction of one of Lagos’s most notorious roads – the Lagos-Benin Expressway. According to Adeline Masquelier, ‘an entire discursive register can be associated with roads as symbols of modernity and of their contradictory impact on people’s experiences’ (2008: 77). In the African context, argues Masquelier, roads often take on ‘an ambivalent nature as both horrifying and fascinating [that] expresses an equally dual perception of what roads stand for’ (2008: 77). Ideally, highways and streets represent a pathway into modernity because they open up rural communities to the city: ‘to economic and industrial

centres that can facilitate communication and bring in development' (Masquelier, 2008: 77). But when these roads by-pass communities, or when they come to be perceived 'as pathways for crime, chaos, and violence' (Masquelier, 2008: 77), they can also signify an obstacle to wealth and commerce – to the fruits of modernity, in other words. Objects of simultaneous terror and desire, 'roads', says Masquelier,

offer a discursive space in which contemporary Africans can deploy ideas about power, violence, mobility, and death in an attempt to wrestle with their conflicted experience of modernity. [In Africa] people routinely consider the mixed blessings of modernity by listening to and circulating stories about the blood-thirsty spirits that prey on innocent travellers (2008: 78).

Condensed in the symbol of the African motorway, then, are some of the perils and potentialities of the modern era; if the highway were to be given voice, it would speak of modernity's seductions and pitfalls⁵.

Lagos is host to one such road. This highway is called the Lagos-Benin Expressway and it is notorious for the numerous car accidents, murders and robberies that have taken place on its strip of precarious gravel. As local blogger Ugochukwu Ejinkeonye puts it, the highway has a reputation for being 'the bloodthirstiest slaughter-slab in the nation'; 'the hold-up witnessed daily on that road is an experience not even a demonized mind can wish for his worst enemy'⁶. This much-hated road plays an important part in *Lagoon*: which Okorafor rechristens with the Gothic title 'the Bone Collector', so named, suitably, for its history as 'a deathtrap' and for being 'full of ghosts' (2014: 189), but also, significantly, for the highway's magical abilities – namely the capacity to consume the bodies of its travellers. The rumour, says Adaora, is that these travellers are eaten by the roadway; their bodies, she says, sink into 'the road's sun-warmed surface like fresh palm oil on hot bread' (2014: 120). These corpses are believed to sustain the spirit that has made this highway its home: 'something has been haunting the road...from *here* and ha[s] probably been here since these roads were built, maybe even before then' (2014: 207). Manifest in this haunted highway is thus a synthesis of the material and the spiritual; due to its association

⁵ Here we might think of a Nigerian novel such as Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), which renders the boundary between the material realm and the spiritual world fluid by charting the story of Azaru, an *abiku* or spirit-child. As its title suggests, the road functions as one of the novel's central images: at times the road is invoked literally, as a strip of gravel upon which characters travel or get lost, and at other times, it is gestured to in a more metaphorical way, as The Road King – a mythical creature forever hungry for victims. See also Wole Soyinka's 1965 play *The Road*.

⁶ Online resource available at: <https://ugochukwu.wordpress.com/2007/06/19/yaradua-please-fix-lagos-shagamu-benin-expressway/>. [Date accessed: June 13 2015]

with danger and risk, a local rumour has begun to circulate that a bloodthirsty spirit lies embedded within the tar. As with the latent power that surfaces in Adaora, this road-spirit, too, is awoken when the aliens enter Lagos. A young traveller, for example, is subjected to a literalisation of the beliefs that surround the road when he tries to cross the freeway – only to feel the ground softening beneath his feet ‘like a squashy pillow’ as the motorway takes on monstrous form: with ‘a deep guttural growl that intensified into a roar’ the road begins ‘rearing up like a serpent of asphalt’ (2014: 172).

In this sense, the monstrous motorway captures not only the mixed-blessings of modern African life, but also what Garuba identifies as an ‘animist materialism’ – a conceptual formulation wherein ‘the object world’ becomes ‘spiritualized’ (2003: 267). It is within an ‘animistic mode of thought’, writes Garuba, that ‘the physical world of phenomena is spiritualized’ (2003: 267). Garuba’s point here is that ‘animist materialism is grounded in the religious consciousness of the material world’ and, in works of African literature, this animist world-view is reified by way of ‘a representational strategy that involves giving the abstract or metaphysical a material realisation’⁷ (2003: 280 & 284). This is a form of conceptualisation, in other words, by which the stuff of matter merges with the immaterial underworld and is devolved, in many works of African fiction, through a coupling of the realistic with the fantastic. Following Garuba, what is re-inscribed when the Bone Collector seeks to collect his bones, is the presence of the magical *within* the material, which works, significantly, to subvert a Western-derived dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular; to disrupt a Euro-American perception of modernity that has sought to ‘emancipate humankind’, as John and Jean Comaroff describe it, ‘from the thrall of miracle and wonder’ (2012: 2). Put slightly differently, the highway, perhaps one of the most pertinent symbols of modernisation, is made in *Lagoon* to resonate with an animist logic that weakens Euro-American modernity’s hierarchical positioning of the physical, “rational” realm over the sphere of magic and myth, which the text achieves by encoding the city into the matrices of the occult.

The supernatural roadway goes further than to simply articulate ‘the originality of the African modern’ (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2008: 9), however. It foreshadows, too, the ferocious

⁷ Garuba notes, for example, that in Southwest Nigeria ‘ironsmiths, motor mechanics, drivers, and all those whose trade has to do with iron’ often seek the protection of Ogun, the god of iron and warfare, by sacrificing a dog as a form of appeasement to him ‘to save them from the hazards of their jobs and keep them in employment’ (2003: 268). The example Garuba provides for this phenomenon details the tale of a hotel manager in Lagos, whose previous car had been stolen, and who thus performs a ritual sacrifice of a dog to Ogun in order to protect his new Peugeot 504. See, ‘Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture and Society’, *Public Culture* 15: 2, pp 261-285.

life-force of Lagos as a city. When Koolhaas took his first steps into Lagos, it was, above all, the metropole's sense of anarchy that initially captured his attention. 'At first', he writes, 'the city had an aura of apocalyptic violence; entire sections of it seemed to be smoldering, as if it were one gigantic rubbish dump' (2002: 177). Yet, Koolhaas quickly learned that despite the city's rising levels of poverty, Lagos's poorest citizens can not only 'organize incredibly efficient transformations of garbage in a highly organised way' (2002: 176) but also perform 'a systematic layering...of minuscule transactions necessary to stay alive in Lagos...made possible through the arrangement, intersection, and mutual confrontation of people and infrastructure' (2002: 180). Since Nigeria's liberation in 1960, Lagos, says Koolhaas, has succeeded in unshackling itself from its old colonial constraints, in particular from old town-planning, and that, regardless of its growing slumlands, lack of infrastructure and sanitation system, as well as a deficit in effective urban management and growing corruption – in spite of being essentially 'left to its own devices' (2002: 183) – the city is "working". Thus, Koolhaas posits Lagos as configuring anxieties about the future of urbanisation and urban living everywhere; as a city that has become a fundamental indicator of the futures that cities globally may one day face.

As such, contemporary Lagos represents what the Comaroffs refer to in *Theory from the South* as the 'privileged insight' that the global south currently affords 'into the workings of the world at large' (2012: 1). According to the Comaroffs, the contemporary African city, a space, specifically, 'where highly flexible, informal economies have long thrived' (2012: 14), is challenging, more and more, preconceived notions of Africa – as 'caught and imagined', for instance, 'with a web of difference and otherness [where] Africa is still seen as an object apart from the world, or as a failed or incomplete example of something else' (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2008: 9). Following these critics, Lagos is serving today as one example of an African urbanism that is articulating, not a form of partial imitation of Euro-American modernisation, but rather a unique mode of urbanisation that radically alters the "normal" trajectory of things: 'Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather, we may be catching up with Lagos' (Comaroffs, 2012: 14). Indeed, as one character in *Lagoon* succinctly puts it: 'Nigeria [has] much to give the world – and to show it' (2014: 279). Thus, we can suggest that it is not the logic of the global north that is the deciding factor in this post-colonial city – rather it is the local experiences, and in many cases, the unfulfilled desires of the metropole's inhabitants, that determine how Lagos is constituted today as a crucible of African innovation.

Key to this idea are the ways in which the material, political, societal and moral effects of the rise of neoliberalism manifest in the contemporary African city, which remain, for the most part, most strikingly evident here (Comaroffs, 2012: 15). It is, in other words, in the global

south that the resulting effects of neoliberal policy are most palpably felt. In *Lagoon*, for example, Lagos is frequently referred to as ‘lasgigi’ – the Las Vegas of Africa (2014: 40). On his arrival in the city, says Ghanaian rapper Anthony, he quickly realised that ‘you bring in what you put out’ (2014: 40). Lagos is undoubtedly the city of hustling, where the hustle never stops: over 60 percent of the city’s economic activity, asserts George Packer, is comprised of informal transactions⁸. Money-making, in other words, is taking place predominantly in the darker corners of this city; as Chris Abani suggests, ‘in Lagos it is not about what is available, only what you can afford’ (2013: 6). Black markets, then, have erupted in Lagos, and these take as their source, according to the Comaroffs, the post-colonial nation-state’s espousal of ‘market fundamentalism’ since this global economic policy is responsible for ‘a gradual erasure of received lines between the informal and the illegal, regulation and irregularity, order and organized lawlessness’ (2006: 5). ‘[O]pened up...under neoliberal conditions’ are thus ‘new aporias of jurisdiction’, which have become potential sites for ‘amassing value’ – that is, for making ‘lucrative returns’ by exploiting ‘zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of the law’ (Comaroffs, 2006: 5).

Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in a city like Lagos, which is well-known for both its lawlessness – its ‘African chaos’ (Okorafor, 2014: 64) – and for the ability of its citizens to find ways of benefiting from this very lack of order. Take, as an example, the city’s various illegal markets that have formed around Lagos’ infamous “go-slows”: traffic jams that last for so many hours that quick-thinking entrepreneurs have found ways of capitalising on the gridlock – selling to this ‘captive cargos of consumers’ (Koolhaas, 2002: 180) everything from soft drinks, cigarettes and fruit to products offering a more hallucinogenic appeal. We encounter a similar scene in *Lagoon*, which depicts Adaora stalled in her journey to the airport as her car joins a line of motors that ‘hadn’t moved an inch in two hours’ (2014: 189). Caught in this traffic, she describes the comings and goings of the market outside:

a girl carrying a tray of peeled oranges was going from car to car...the girl wasn’t the only hawker trying to make some money from the chaos. Women and girls had emerged selling all sorts of foodstuffs...two young men knocked over a young girl selling boiled eggs. They ran off with her money (2014: 189).

What this scene renders apparent regarding the city, then, is a furious need that Lagos cultivates within its inhabitants to invent new forms of employment and enterprise; to find ways of ‘capitalising’, as Okorafor puts it, ‘on the chaos’ (2014: 189). Much of this anxiety has to do with

⁸ Online resource available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/13/the-megacity> [Date accessed: 5 August 2015]

the vast economic inequalities that constitute the city – in Lagos, asserts Akin Adesokan, the destitute form more than two-thirds of the city's population, 'suggesting a level of poverty at odds with Nigeria's high earnings from oil revenues' (2013: 192). For Abani, it is indeed this disparate quality that strongly characterises Lagos today: the city, he writes, is home to 'houses that even the richest people in the USA cannot imagine owning', which 'the poor go out of their way to drive past [because] everyone can dream' (2013: 6).

Thus, the neoliberal emerges as the new face of the colonial, Manichean city: a place still 'cut in two' and 'divided into compartments' (Fanon, 1967: 29). And it is from within such provisos – in particular, under the uneven distribution of wealth which neoliberalism affects – that another, markedly *Gothic* monetary system has developed in Africa. Termed by the Comaroffs an 'occult economy', this is a form of 'money magic' which looks to 'secure immediate wealth by largely inscrutable means' (2012: 159). Significant to the creation of this spectral economy are post-colonial contexts which have been confronted with the prospect of emancipation under neoliberal conditions: 'where evocative calls for entrepreneurialism confront realities of marginalization in the distribution of resources...with its taunting mix of desire and disappointment, liberation and limitation' (Comaroffs, 2012: 159). Under these contradictory conditions, the African city often becomes a space where individuals can 'work out their dreams' as Onookome Okome puts it, 'in a post-colonial elixir of deceit and fraud' (2002: 328). Projected, in other words, as the African continent has been 'washed over by a flood of mass media from across the earth' are images of desire and consumerism that remain, for all but the most affluent, as pervasive as they are unattainable (Comaroffs, 2012: 159), and such circumstances have resulted in an amplification of efforts by individuals to grasp the seemingly veiled 'logic of supply and demand': 'to restore a measure of transparency' argue the Comaroffs, 'to the connection between production and value, work and wealth' (2012: 159).

From the moment that Okorafor's creatures enter Lagos, they are subjected to the city's occult economy when they become hunted by the city's citizens who wish to commodify the aliens for their powers. 'Any symbol of wealth', as Adaora suggests, 'would eventually become a target in Lagos' (2014: 149) and the creatures are considered valuable indeed: they are coveted by a group of 419 scammers for their shape-shifting skins, who plan to kidnap (in many a comical gesture) the aliens and thereafter force them to 'enter online people bank accounts' in order for the group to 'bypass the middleman' and 'go direct to the money' (2014: 56). For these scammers, the "true" magic that the aliens possess is that they seem to be able to make money immediately and *from nothing* – because of their ability to change form, the conmen believe that they can get the creatures to 'print money for us. Naira, notes, American dollar notes, euro, even

sef, pound, sterling...nobody [is going to be] rich like us...we [will] be rich before the sun go[es] down' (2014: 56 - 57). Animated in this scene, then, is a performance of the occult solutions that the conmen seek for their material problems - as they turn to 'magical means to attain material ends'; as they draw on the mystical, the superstitious - to 'forces that yield money without material effort' (2012: 38). Thus are we returned to the contradictory character that constitutes Lagos for both Okorafor's literary forefathers and for herself: the city's 'split character', namely the contradictory nature that is generated from a city caught 'between a tradition that looks back to the past and a modernity that identifies with progress and the benefits of globalization' (Okome, 2002: 327). Lagos is continually figured in *Lagoon*, then, as a place of negotiation and confrontation between international norms and local politics; this is a narrative that persistently evokes the city as an urban imaginary where Western and African cultures collide and mix, and where these confrontations and resulting effects are played out.

Conclusion: Continual Re-enchantment

This is a novel, then, that 'embeds', to borrow from Curry, 'an animist unconscious into everyday practice' (2014: 46) - and it is here, I think, that *Lagoon's* intervention lies. What makes this text unique is its exploration of the enchanted African city, an imagining of Lagos where the presence of magic and the supernatural is not considered incommensurate to the urban-realm, but which is rather an active part of those societies which are 'modern and future facing' (Curry, 2014: 46). By consciously incorporating various fantastical components into its urban framework, *Lagoon* evinces a mode of being in the world that places emphasis on a series of counter-hegemonic virtues by continually subverting the oppositional logics that look to separate modernity from magic, the human from the non-human, culture from nature. In fact, to conclude, I would venture that Okorafor's urban-text - a novel that makes use of several *Gothic* components - has implications for our current ecological thought and practice. Here I want to return to Timothy Beatley's writings in *Blue Urbanism*, which suggests that one of the ways in which we might fuse the urban with the ocean involves a turn, significantly, to 'wonder and magic' (2014: 165). Ecological realms such as the ocean-water that laps against the shores of Lagos's Bar Beach are repositories of what Beatley terms 'immense awe and wonder', in that these environments constitute 'a magical world, that once exposed to us, is immensely fascinating and harbors the great possibility of imparting new levels of pleasure and meaning to humans' (2014: 165). My thought here, while a tentative one, is that *Lagoon* might contribute, through its employment of the Gothic thematic of magic and the supernatural, to this project of generating new levels of meanings for humans - a project that looks to 'shift us beyond ourselves in order to 'provide [us

with] a sense of the whole of which we are a part' (2014: 165). My suggestion, building on Beatley's writings, is that the value of Okorafor's narrative lies in its ability to re-orientate the human mind towards the natural-realm by way of what Garuba describes as '*a continual re-enchantment of the world*' (2003: 265) – such that *Lagoon* successfully disrupts inflexible bio-social dichotomies, and thereby potentiates the capacity to aid us in formulating future-imaginings that take cognisance of the profound interconnectivities and interdependencies that constitute our world.

Gothic Jo'burg: Darkness, Light and Lines of Flight in *Zoo City*

Johannesburg...it's the city of dreams – and nightmares.

- Lauren Beukes, 2014¹

Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* is the most explicitly Gothic text out of the three novels considered in this project. In this novel, Beukes draws on the surface-depth-edges dialectic of Johannesburg and revises this composition in her Gothic rendering of the city. Darkly evoked in *Zoo City*, Johannesburg is perceived as an urban locale riddled with black magic, crime, and various temporal overlays; the city is also – perhaps most characteristically Gothic of all – portrayed as host to a gruesome secret that lies embedded in its core. For this chapter, I read Beukes's Gothic rendition of Jo'burg with recourse to the writings of Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, who argue that to fully conceptualise the 'elusive metropolis' that is Johannesburg, 'we need a more complex anthropology of things, forms, and signs...to account for the life of the city in Africa' (2008: 8). The necessity, suggest these critics, is to 'defamiliarise commonsense readings of Africa' by 'working with new archives' in order to provide readers with a sense 'of the African metropolis as a compositional process requiring particular acts of deciphering' (2008: 9 – 10). The chapter takes this call as its cue and offers the Gothic lens presented to us in *Zoo City*'s pages as a new and generative tool through which to survey and decipher Johannesburg. I argue for the analytical power that this register unfolds by suggesting that Beukes's investment in Gothic machinery offers a particular purchase on modes of reading the African city as simultaneously dark and light, real and imagined, familiar and unfamiliar – imbued, equally, with nightmares and dreams.

In *Zoo City*, its Johannesburg setting, as well as the emphasis that the narrative places on the perspectives of those who live on the city's margins, play a similarly significant role. In fact, as Jessica Dickson asserts, 'so central is city-ness in Beukes's novel, offering an arresting and compelling angle of attention to Johannesburg and the subjectivities of its inhabitants, that...it warrants consideration within the growing canon of works on African urbanism' (2014: 67). Johannesburg is indeed a character in its own right in this text; throughout *Zoo City*, Beukes gestures to various characteristic parts of the metropolis as she sculpts her city-narrative into Gothic form. She opens the novel, for example, by exposing her protagonist to 'light the sulphur colour of the mine dumps seep[ing] across Johannesburg's skyline', waking her as this glare

¹ Cited in Dickson. 2014. 'Reading the (Zoo) City', *The Johannesburg Salon*, 7, pp 67-78.

bounces off Ponte Tower and across her bed (2010: 1 - 3). The protagonist under discussion is named Zinzi December, a young black woman who lives in a near-future version of inner-city Johannesburg. Zinzi has been relegated to the notorious² neighbourhood of Hillbrow, due to the magical interspecies relationship that she shares with an animal named Sloth. Zinzi has earned this connection to Sloth as the result of her criminal past, which encompasses a series of transgressions ranging from drug addiction, the manipulation of her friends and family, as well as the unintended participation in her brother's murder. It is implied that it is Zinzi's remorse regarding her brother's death – not necessarily her responsibility, in other words – that has given rise to her relationship with Sloth, who she must carry slung over her shoulder 'like my own personal scarlet letter' (2010: 50). Along with Sloth, Zinzi possesses a supernatural signature 'for finding lost things', a 'talent' that this interspecies union has bestowed upon her and which has caused her to hire out her supernaturally-gifted-self to people looking to find their missing commodities. Also significant to Sloth and Zinzi's relationships is that the ties that bind them link not only their bodies (making them inseparable) but also their lives: if these strings were to be severed, Zinzi would be dragged down by 'the Undertow' – a chaotic swirl of dark matter also termed 'shadow-self adsorption', which 'serves as the counterpoint to, and bedrock for, the principle of existence' (2010: 158).

Zinzi and Sloth's 'aposymbiotic' relationship is the result of a recent global condition or syndrome, the first case of which was recorded in 2003 between an Afghanistan drug-lord and a penguin. In South Africa, the 'zoo' condition is referred to as 'Mashavi', a Shona term 'used to describe both the preternatural talents conferred by an aposymbiot and aposymbiot animal itself' (2010: 177). Various theses are offered in the novel as to why this phenomenon has occurred. Some theories include the (most widely accepted) belief that the animals are the manifestation of an individual's 'sin', the suspicion that they 'are *zvidboma* or witches' familiars', and the theory that the animals are a 'punishment' for those who are involved in criminal activity and therefore an indication of a person's dark past, which the criminal must bear with them 'like the guy in Pilgrim's Progress lugging around his sack of guilt' (2010: 52). What is not in question is that the zoos – those who are marked by 'a spirit critter at [their] side' (2010: 9) – are fiercely stigmatised; 'in China', Zinzi tells us, 'they execute zoos on principle' (2010: 9). Johannesburg is yet to enforce such totalitarian tactics, but the 'animalled' are nonetheless shunned 'to the edges of society' (2010: 254) and consequently forced to live in the city's most derelict and dangerous areas – namely Zoo City, the name given to the suburb of Hillbrow to signify its zoo inhabitants.

² Due to its association 'with danger, criminality, marginality, and blackness' (Dickson, 2014: 67). 'Reading the (Zoo) City', *The Johannesburg Salon*, 7, pp 67-78.

Like the ‘criminals, murderers, rapists [and] junkies’ (2010: 8) who live here, it is Zinzi’s disgraced zoo status that brought her to this part of Johannesburg in the first place: ‘[i]t was inevitable’, says Zinzi, ‘that I’d end up in Zoo City. Although I didn’t realise that until after the fifth rental agency had sneered over their clipboards at Sloth and told me they didn’t have anything available in the suburbs – had I tried Hillbrow?’ (2010: 50).

The action of the novel is put into play when Zinzi is offered a job by two baleful characters, a man with a yapping Maltese at his side and a woman with an injured Marabou strapped to her back, who ask Zinzi to use her magical capacities to assist them in finding a missing teenage girl. The girl’s name is Songweza Radebe and, along with her twin brother S’bu, makes up a singing duo called iJuzi. The Radebe twins are represented by *Zoo City*’s primary villain, Odysseus (Odi) Huron – a ‘reclusive musical genius’ (2010: 138) who lives holed up in a decaying Herbert Baker mansion in one of Johannesburg’s gated communities. Huron operates in the narrative as representative of all that is caught in the past, manifest not only in his crumbling Baker³ domicile, but also in his inability to rid himself of his own shady history, which finds form in the albino Crocodile that he has been hiding in his backyard swimming pool. It is at the text’s climax that this pool is revealed as the site for many a Gothic secret: not only does it house Huron’s secret Animal, but the pool is also the dumping ground for the bodies of Huron’s numerous victims. These victims have been killed by the music producer, together with the Maltese and the Marabou, in an occult ritual that Huron believes will cut the ties between him and his Crocodile in the hopes of separating himself from the manifestation of his dark past, and the twins are to be his final victims. Thus, Zinzi comes to realise that the darker side of the city finds its fullest expression here, in ‘the rotten heart of leafy suburbia’ (2010: 67) and not, as we might have expected, in Zinzi’s more notorious criminal home.

Indeed, continually contrasted with Huron’s foreclosed and rotting neighbourhood is Zoo City – a place where ‘bad things can be beautiful’ (2010: 118) and which, in spite of its poverty and ‘nocturnal soundscape’ (2010: 115) of gunfire, is described as a locale of fluid sociability and open doors. It is Zinzi – whose animalled body represents the destabilisation of borders (between private and public, human and nonhuman) – who possess the ability to surface such a mobile and un-foreclosed account of Johannesburg. Moreover, as a criminalised individual, Zinzi possesses a particular edge on the metropolis; as Mbembe and Nuttall argue, the criminal offers an evocative purchase on the city because this is a figure who ‘moves between the

³ Baker was an architect who came to South Africa in the early 18th century to make his fortune. His buildings are tributes to empire in the country. See online resource available at: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/article-1356395080302/> [Date accessed: 5 August 2015]

surface and the underground' (2008: 23). Certainly this is so in *Zoo City* – throughout this narrative, Zinzi travels between various visible and invisible urban spaces as she traverses Johannesburg in her search for the twins. Her narration flits between a montage of urban-fragments, describing to us the metropole as she moves across its centre and outskirts; from its older sections to its newly developing ones; through its surface, edges and underground parts – continually invoking, along the way, a blending of the city's material and magical elements.

In the process, Johannesburg becomes re-written as Zinzi travels through its fragments. Her journey, as we will see, is one which embeds the mythical components of the metropole into its structural features, grafting, in this quintessentially Gothic way, 'the two sides of the border ...onto each other...displaying on one side the contours of reality, the detail and structure of everyday life, on the other the shadowy realm of myth' (Punter, 1996: 189). Zinzi's journey invokes, in other words, one of Gothic's primary techniques: the 'intermingling', as David Punter asserts, of 'the daylight world and the world of night' (2011: 12). Gothic plays a significant part, then, in *Zoo City* – though it has thus far gone mostly unnoticed. Most of Beukes's critics, for example, approach her work through either dystopic analyses (Stobie, 2012) or read the novel as an example of budding post-colonial science fiction (Dickson, 2014). Such critical work is yet to closely consider *Zoo City's* preoccupation with buried secrets, the occult and temporal hauntings – some of Gothic's hallmarks. This chapter's contribution is to fill this lacuna by considering the ways that the Gothic is implemented in *Zoo City* in order to capture Johannesburg most wholly: as a city made up of a series of intricate interplays between its realities and myths; its metropolis and necropolis; its shiny surface and dark underworld.

Darkening the Post-Apartheid City of Gold

In *Zoo City*, it is the gated estate that lies at the heart of the narrative's Gothic imagination. 'Festering' behind the surfaces of these homes, says Zinzi, is 'a middle class paranoia' less concerned with 'keeping the world out' and more with shutting things 'in' (2010: 84). Located in the more affluent parts of the metropolis, the gated community is cast as a signifier for all that is rotten and stagnant in Johannesburg, manifesting a Gothic haunting by the past of the present. The persistent presence of the past here concerns the inherited apartheid logic of the fortified suburb, which seeks to shut out transformation – to keep things, as Zinzi informs us, *in* – by segregating itself from the rest of the city in much the same way that the National Party sought to separate urban areas by race through its implementation of the Group Areas Act in 1950. The segregationist quality of the enclosed enclave works, in other words, to darken a city otherwise attempting to re-define itself under the egalitarian sign of democracy; as Lindsay Bremner argues,

the reinforcement of Johannesburg's middle-class residential-areas seems to be deepening, rather than dismantling, the social and spatial divisions that characterised the apartheid city of old (2010: 215)⁴. Mark Gevisser, too, writes that 'the disparities of Johannesburg are immediately evident' when looking at 'the leafy green forest of Johannesburg's affluent northern suburbs'; these 'ramparts', he suggests, 'provide perspective over not only space but also time' (2008: 318). Indeed, for many of the city's critics, one particularly flagrant feature of Johannesburg's post-apartheid urbanism concerns the formation of a 'citadel culture' in the metropolis, a culture built less on old racial fault-lines than on class divisions: as Loren Kruger describes it, 'a pervasive fear of crime' is reflected in parts of Johannesburg's 'built environment marked by gated estates not only in affluent, historically white suburbs but also in middle-class enclaves in Soweto' (2015: 16). Following Kruger, a new kind of economic apartheid has taken root in the city, one that is characterised by an almost pathological obsession with security – as a result of a dramatic increase in 'organised crime', says Bremner, '[h]ouseholders install ever more sophisticated physical security measures... transforming streets...into secured enclaves with controlled access points', the resultant effects being the intensification of urban segregation and the loss of 'a sense of shared space' (2010: 224).

It is hardly by accident, then, that the home of the odious Odysseus Huron is situated in one such foreclosed neighbourhood. Similarly to the houses described above, Huron's 'rambling Westville property' – which dates, significantly, back to Johannesburg's Gold Rush and colonial days ('to the 1900s' [2010: 67]) – is 'overshadowed with oaks and jacarandas and elms' (2010: 67) and patrolled by a series of armed guards employed by a private security firm. These security measures, we learn, are being implemented by Johannesburg's non-zoo'ed citizens to curtail the infiltration of 'the animalled' into the suburbs: when she attempts to enter one of these fortified areas, Zinzi is fiercely grilled by the guard at the gate, who 'insists that [I] step out of the car to be photographed by the webcam mounted on the window of his security booth [because there are] animalists everywhere' (2010: 85). Here reformulated, then, are the apartheid divisions of the past into zoos and non-zoos – identities that Beukes invents as a means of raising questions regarding citizenship and criminalisation as these inform the post-apartheid context. The novel brings to the surface, in this way, what Bremner describes as the 'new distinctions' that are emerging in the metropole, 'between victim and criminal, fear and bravado, vulnerability and immunity' – distinctions that are haunting, or, to use Bremner's term, 'crisscrossing', 'the old ones of race, class and gender in the creation of Johannesburg's new economic order' (2010:

⁴ See also Theresa Caldeira's study of fortification in democratic São Paula in 'Fortified Enclaves: Building Up Walls and Creating a New Private Order', *City of Walls: crime, citizenship and segregation in São Paulo*. Berkley: University of California Press. 2000, pp 256-291

216). We should expand Bremner's list to include distinctions between citizens and transnationals, since Johannesburg is also a city shot through with migrants and immigrants – 'an instant city', as Mbembe and Nuttall envision it, 'of strangers, aliens and foreigners' (2008: 17). And sure enough, the guard who treats Zinzi with such suspicion is named 'Joao', an ex-soldier from a war-torn part of Africa (2010: 67).

Meanwhile, a hidden danger – in characteristic Gothic style – lurks not outside Huron's elaborately secured estate but *within*. This is foreshadowed by Zinzi when she looks up at the 'ten-metre high walls topped with electric fencing' that surround Huron's home and thinks that '[a]nything could happen behind those walls and you wouldn't know a thing. Maybe that's the point' (2010: 68). Everything about Huron's estate suggests that Zinzi is entering a portentous Gothic location indeed: inside the mansion, the Persian carpets are faded, the elaborate chandeliers dusty and a rotten smell hangs in the air, 'like week-old vase water' (2010: 71). Outside Huron's ruinous domicile, the grounds fair little better: the rolling lawns are 'dry and yellowing' and the 'vile green swimming pool' is framed by a classic water feature of two maidens warped by a layer of lichen, which 'blank[s] out their features like a beauty mask gone wild. Like someone ate their faces' (2010: 73). It is this pool – ever a signifier of economic privilege – that proves Zinzi's suspicions about the dark underbelly of the fortified community correct: teeming beneath the 'rotting leaves cloying the surface' (2010: 73) of the swimming pool lies a hidden necropolis in the form of 'a secret underground lake' (2010: 305) that contains the numerous decomposing corpses of the people that Huron has been killing over a series of years. And among these putrefying bodies lurks Huron's 'Former Life' secret – his albino Crocodile, which has been feeding, in a further grisly Gothic gesture, on the flesh of Huron's victims.

This Crocodile emerges as a significant metaphorical figure for a number of reasons. The first of these concerns the implication of the creature's albinism, which can be read as a marker of Huron's involvement in South Africa's history of white supremacy – Huron is described, after all, as having been part of 'South Africa's ever-evolving cultural fabric since the dark days of apartheid' (2010: 139). Indeed, it cannot be overlooked that most of Huron's victims are black and vulnerable in some way; the Radebe twins, for example, are not only young and naïve but they are also AIDS orphans. Huron's exploitation of the twins is here evoked, then, to express the consumptive nature of Johannesburg both past and present. In terms of the city's present context, much of what constitutes Johannesburg's features today has to do with the 'unrepentant culture of commercialism' that makes up what Mbembe terms 'the nervous rhythm of the city and its cultural pulse' (2008: 38.). Nuttall, too, argues that contemporary Johannesburg is one of the focal sites for 'the rise of new media and cultures of consumption' that has taken place since

the end of apartheid (2008: 91). For Nuttall, particularly salient to this budding market is the emergence of the city's new black middle-class, the reason being that many black South Africans have turned to commodity forms 'to produce some of the most powerful reimaginings of race that South Africa has known in some time' (2008: 92 - 93). Free from a long history that denied blacks the right to be consumers and sought to define them instead 'as eternally rural or as objects of charity' young black South Africans are increasingly embracing the 'potential unfixing' provided by 'the commodity form', through which they can both style themselves anew and 'engage with ideas about citizenship – and South Africa's future' (Nuttall, 2008: 91 – 114). Put slightly differently, the consumer market has emerged as a site of potential emancipation for many black South Africans living in the post-apartheid moment; after all, as the Comaroffs describe it, 'the end of apartheid held out the prospect that *everyone* would be set free' – free, in particular, 'to speculate and accumulate, to consume and to indulge repressed desires' (1999: 284).

We encounter this freedom to accumulate and consume in *Zoo City* through its portrayal of the Radebe twins, who are drawn to the glamour of Johannesburg's music industry in the hopes of becoming South Africa's next big stars – as Songweza informs us, 'we're going to be massive' (2010: 143). Thanks to Huron's efforts, iJusi's music has indeed garnered much fame: 'there's not a sentient soul in South Africa' reads one of the novel's magazine articles, 'who hasn't heard Spark' – a recent track that has become 'the sound of a million ringtones' (2010: 141). But the narrative emphasises the shiny surfaces – the 'image', the 'glitz' and the 'glamour' (2010: 71) – of Johannesburg's music scene as belying a darker narrative of consumption, reified by Huron, who has been using his production company as a front in order to collect the human bodies he requires as sacrifices in the occult ritual that he must undertake in order to separate himself from his Crocodile. Huron's production company is here framed, thus, in Gothic terms: the 'musical potential' that he sees in 'black artists' functions simply as a mask for his real and more sinister interests in their 'commercial possibilities' – that is, their capacity to act as material that Huron can exploit for his own gain (2010: 140). This notion of capitalist accumulation is taken to its gruesome and literal extreme in *Zoo City*'s bloody climax, which depicts Songweza's being killed and eaten by Huron's Crocodile: 'the Crocodile slithers forward and rips a piece out of Songweza's leg...its white gullet undulating with the weight of flesh' (2010: 298). Invoked here, in other words, is Songweza's subjection to the material trappings that she had at first considered to possess emancipatory potential – as she and S'bu fall victim to Huron's queasy agenda of 'cultivating talent only so he [can] slice them open' (2010: 305). So does Beukes's implementation of Gothic's techniques allow her to underscore the darker powers that wax

behind the shiny surfaces of Johannesburg's commercial music industry, creating a narrative that resonates, in the process, with the capitalist logic that looks to produce wealth without personal cost – a cost paid, inevitably, by someone else. *Zoo City* brings to the fore, in this way, the ways in which capitalism works to render 'the margin between the human and the inhuman...ever more permeable' (Comaroffs, 1999: 286) as people become a gruesome part of the 'the world of *things*' (Mbembe, 2003: 33).

But the Crocodile's consumption of the Radebe twins recalls, too, the legacy of Johannesburg's apartheid past – a history that sought 'to write black South Africans out of urban existence', according to Meg Samuelson, 'and fix them instead in ossified traditions from which they could be plucked at will for terms of migrant labour' (2008: 64 -66). To 'produce South African city-space as white' as well as to affirm white control over the urban landscape (Samuelson, 2008: 66), apartheid legislation looked to situate blacks in their so-called "tribal homelands", townships located along the fringes of the city from which they could be 'plucked', as Samuelson asserts, to perform the cheap labour required by whites living in suburban areas, whose lifestyles were achieved and maintained by the labour of their black domestic servants. The legacy of this system is thus deeply felt and critiqued in *Zoo City* through its representation of Huron's white Crocodile, who cannibalises and feeds on the life-force of the Radebe twins whilst living apart in a mansion determined, in spite of its impending ruination, to remain frozen in time. As such, the gated community is cast as a Gothic site in which the past is continually re-surfaced – a haunting that works to de-stabilise notions of the secured enclave as a place of safety, escape or even reclusion. Through Huron's Crocodile, Beukes looks to invoke the consumptive underpinnings of South African history, and shows these to be the foundation upon which the lifestyles of Johannesburg's elite continue to rest – notably achieved through her portrayal of the rich, bloated and immobile Huron, who lives fettered to his past while the reinforcement of new economic apartheid crystallises around him.

Thus are the hidden horrors of Johannesburg past and present laid bare. But also salient to *Zoo City* is a more literal urban-underground, to which we find further reference in the Crocodile's white scales. These albino markings resonate, in other words, not only with a monstrous legacy of white supremacy, but also with the skin pigmentation of troglodytes – creatures that live in dark caves and derive their pale flesh from a lack of exposure to sunlight. Encoded, too, within the figure of the Crocodile, then, are the footprints of the mining origins of Johannesburg. The city's story begins in the late nineteenth century with the Witwatersrand Gold Rush; hence Johannesburg's other name – 'Egoli', the City of Gold (Mbembe, 2008: 39). From this mining boom was birthed the formation of the metropolis and is therefore what made

Johannesburg ‘the first site on the continent’, according to Mbembe, ‘where capital, labor and industry came together’ (2008: 39). The profit generated by the mines is also, significantly, what formed South Africa’s economy as a whole: ‘For nearly 150 years’, asserts Sakhela Buhlungu, ‘the mining industry has been the catalyst for South Africa’s economic development and therefore the country’s proverbial goose that lays the golden egg’ (2013: 10). It is ‘thanks to mining’, writes Buhlungu, that ‘South Africa has the largest economy on the continent and boasts cities, financial institutions, infrastructure and technological advances that can hold their own among the best in the world’ (2013: 10). But, as we have seen similarly expressed in *Zoo City*, another tale lies concealed beneath this ‘glamorous [and] positive mining narrative’ – namely, the ‘dark’ and ‘distasteful legacy’ of the migrant labour system, which entailed ‘the tearing apart of families, as men were plucked in their prime and confined to single-sex compounds thousands of kilometres from their homes’, where they were exposed to the radical insecurity and ‘gross exploitation’ of the mining industry (Buhlungu, 2013: 13). We could describe this occurrence in Gevisser’s words by suggesting that South Africa’s mining business is what gave rise to the development of ‘Johannesburg’s vertical equation’: ‘the deeper down the workers dug, the higher up the bosses could build their skyline’ (2014: 150).

Zinzi stumbles twice upon this mining narrative during her search for the Radebe twins. She first confronts the ruins of Johannesburg’s origins after she is expelled from one of the city’s storm water drains and ‘washes up kilometres away’ from where she began (2008: 187). Here, Zinzi encounters a part of the metropole that she has never seen before:

It’s not like I’m the world authority on Joburg’s storm drains, but I’ve been down here enough times looking for lost things to know the basic lie of the land. This is all unfamiliar. The tunnels are a scramble of pitch-black termite holes, some of them narrowing away to nothing, like whoever was digging them got bored and wandered off. The original gold-diggings maybe, when Johannesburg was still just a bunch of hairy prospectors scrabbling in the dirt (2010: 188).

Thus, Zinzi comes to learn that the hidden depths beneath the city house not only forgotten things but latent histories as well; a finding that renders strange her previous understanding of Johannesburg’s underground as she comes to reflect on the abandoned and unseen mining structures that pay tribute to the mining foundations of the city. This history is acutely felt, too, when Zinzi travels to Johannesburg’s edges, ‘south, to where the last of the mine dumps are – sulphur-coloured artificial hills, the ravages of weather and reprocessing, shored up with scrubby grass and eucalyptus trees’ (2010: 255). Here, Zinzi finds the body of one of Huron’s victims, whose corpse lies disposed of between the dumps that mark Johannesburg’s erosive mining past, as well as its self-consumptive present: because these ‘ugly valleys have been gouged out and

trucked away by the ton to sift out the last scraps of gold the mining companies missed the first time round' Zinzi thinks that '[m]aybe it's appropriate that eGoli, place of Gold, should be self-cannibalising' (2010: 255). We encounter in this scene, then, a merging of the narratives of the past with those of the present – as Zinzi surfaces from the dumps the bodies of those who are consumed and laid waste by the social, material and historical structures that characterise the City of Gold. This finding is made possible by Zinzi's ability to 'find lost things' (2010: 5) and is thus one that serves to unpeel from Johannesburg its attractive exterior, as Zinzi invokes the flipside of the city by rendering visible the forgotten narratives that lie beneath the city's shiny surface. In keeping with the Gothic tradition, the city is here darkly perceived – as 'a monster that swallows people whole', to borrow from Perfect Hlongwane's novel *Jozi*, 'a furnace whose flames lick hungrily at the particles of humanity as they dance, lost in the wind' (2013: 1).

Finding Light and Lines of Flight

Even places of darkness hold the potential, however, to become sites of hope. Indeed, as Mbembe and Nuttall so powerfully remind us, the subterranean parts of Johannesburg are best understood when we view them as comprised of histories of 'suffering and alienation' *as well as* of tales 'of rebellion and insurrection' (2008: 21). The story of the metropole's underneath, in other words, is misunderstood if taken as simply one of desolation, exploitation and abjection – since this site has functioned, too, as 'the repository of possibilities for invention and utopian dreams'; 'in Johannesburg', suggest these critics, 'the underground was the symbol of the powerful forces contained in the depths of the city' (2008: 21-22). Here, we might take, as an example, Mbembe's study of apartheid Johannesburg, in which he argues that 'Johannesburg was never a totally foreclosed city even during the height of apartheid' – instead the city was 'made up of leakages, of *several lines of flight* that not only co-existed but intermingled, that transformed and crossed over into one another' (2008: 47- 48, italics my own).

Mbembe borrows the term 'lines of flight' from the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who in *A Thousand Plateaus* formulate 'a line of flight' as an escape from fixed signification; it is a concept used to indicate a flight from predetermined structures that seek or serve to impose and assign fixed meanings, attributes and places to objects, subjects, signs and actions (1987: 510). In Mbembe's description of Johannesburg under apartheid, 'lines of flight' therefore refer to the limits of the state's capacity to restrain, contain and stultify the movement of black South Africans in and out of the metropole – as well as to signify apartheid's failure to curtail the many positive experiences that blacks associated with Johannesburg in spite of its attempts to mark them with second-class citizenship and deny them rights to the city. Mbembe's

invocation of ‘lines of flight’ gesture, in other words, to the failing of apartheid’s efforts to fully restrain the ‘reciprocal dependencies’ that took place ‘among different races’ in Johannesburg, and as well as to signal the inability that the National Party had to impose complete authority over the urban landscape, and thus casts light on ‘the incompleteness of apartheid rule and its attempts at colonizing the city’ (Mbembe, 2008: 51). In fact, as Mbembe argues, the movement of blacks through the city is what resulted in the ‘making and remaking of [Johannesburg’s] forms’, a shifting character that attributed to apartheid Johannesburg a ‘fugitive quality’ (2008: 51). In this sense, Johannesburg has always represented, ‘for many blacks who migrated here’, more than simply a narrative of racial oppression – because the city also ‘offered a sense of cultural release, a partial state of freedom, inebriation, and ease’, which ‘rested as much on the sensory flow of urban experience as on the contingency and unpredictability of everyday life’ (Mbembe, 2008: 51).

Zoo City is shot through with such lines of flight, which I invoke here to describe the post-apartheid city-context as one that is informed by an apartheid history, but not completely or utterly; my use of ‘lines of flight’ refer, in other words, to the contemporary South African context as one that is not solely informed by the legacy of the past, or by its perpetuation, but rather by a series of complex interactions between global and local forces. A pertinent example of this concerns Beukes’s choice to house her zoo’ed heroine in the inner-city suburb of *Hillbrow* – a space historically renowned for being an urban “grey-area”; that is, an area in which the laws of the apartheid city were transcended. Gevisser formulates apartheid Hillbrow as ‘the focus of revolution because of its proximity to town, its profusion of cheap accommodation and its porous and somewhat libertine reputation as a haven for migrants and misfits’ (2014: 171). Hillbrow was originally formulated as a white-designated district, which took as its market residents looking for a taste of “European life”: as Abdoumalik Simone describes it, Hillbrow was designed ‘as a cosmopolitan, European city in Africa, but only for a small segment of its population’ (2008: 72). In the 1980’s, this truncated form of urbanism underwent a series of transformations as black South Africans began to defy the Group Areas Act by moving to the inner city, resulting, as we have seen evoked in *Zoo City*, in the flight ‘of whites to distant northern suburbs and gated communities’ (Simone, 2008: 68). Hillbrow is a significant part of the city not only for its ‘revolutionary’ history, to which we have seen Gevisser refer, but also because this area is the site for some of the city’s fastest forms of transformation – Mbembe argues, for example, that Hillbrow is currently being used by foreigners and South Africans alike ‘in ways that are radically different to its original purposes’ (2008: 59). Indeed, according to Ravi Nessman, Hillbrow is characterised by ‘a vibrancy and a sense of community that is certainly not

found in any of Johannesburg's walled-off northern suburbs and sterile malls' (2002: 194). Simone suggests, too, that the inner-city – while certainly plays host to 'multiple levels of conflict' – is marked by a powerful sense of sociality: Hillbrow's close living conditions also, 'foster', he argues, 'intense cooperation among fellow nationals and ethnics' (2008: 75). And it is from this co-operative crucible that an image emerges of 'the quintessential African city' because Hillbrow is an example of African urbanity currently providing 'an intersection where different styles, schemes, sectors, and practices can make something out of and from one another' (Simone, 2008: 88). This idea is extended by Tanja Winkler in *Changing Space, Changing City*, when she writes that Hillbrow is a place much like Lagos in that it creates 'hope, order and stability amid perceived chaos and decay' (2014: 487).

So, too, is Beukes's rendition of Hillbrow, where various criminals and their Animal counterparts carve out a living 'do[ing] what it takes...tak[ing] the opportunities' (2008: 307). Sharing Zinzi's building, for example, are a multitude of individuals who live on the urban and social fringes (misfits, indeed), including her partner Benoît, a refugee from DRC, and a transgender prostitute who works the gritty street below. We learn that the reason for Zoo City's miscellaneous make up is derived from its non-discriminatory policy: 'We're all about tolerance in Zoo City', says Zinzi, '[o]r mutually assured desperation' (2010: 44). However, in tune with the descriptions of Hillbrow offered above, Zinzi insists that her home is misunderstood if viewed as simply a place of anxiety and desperation. Hillbrow, Zinzi tells us, is also a pulsing centre shot-through with community, which Johannesburg's wealthier residents fail to fully recognise:

[p]eople who would happily speed through Zoo City during the day won't detour here at night because [t]hey're too scared, but that's precisely when Zoo City is at its most sociable. From 6pm, when the day-jobbers start getting back from whatever work they've been able to pick up, apartment doors are flung open. Kids chase each other down the corridors. People take their animals out for fresh air...the smell of cooking – mostly food, but also meth – temporarily drowns out the stench of rot, the urine in stairwells (2010: 115).

Thus, in Hillbrow Zinzi sees a mixture of sociality, crime and decay; both hope and fear. Indeed, it is while living in Zoo City that Zinzi meets and finds love in Benoît, who takes her to the rooftop of their dilapidated building in order to show her that even 'bad things can be beautiful' (2010: 118). Standing together above Johannesburg, Benoît and Zinzi look out over the urban skyline and see 'the city graded in rusts and coppers by the sinking sun', a sunset significantly magnified by the city's pollution: 'It's the dust in the air that makes the Highveld sunsets so spectacular, the fine yellow mineral deposits kicked up in the mine dumps, the carbon-dioxide choke of the traffic' (2010: 118). Hillbrow is characterised here, then, as an urban hub

undergoing a series of transformations – as decay and deprivation give way to a web of social alliances and intimacies; as ugliness, rot and pollution transform into beauty. What is achieved in this scene, in other words, is a narration of Hillbrow that extends the inner-city's story beyond 'an ethnography of bare life' (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 2008: 353) as Hillbrow's features are expanded past its reputation for criminality and poverty, and presented instead as sites of transition and light. Beukes contrasts the festering gated suburb with Zinzi's home of open doors and transformation, and in doing so, brings to the surface ways of thinking through the city with the kinds of 'openness and contingency' that are required 'for theorizing the ideas, people, images and imaginaries that characterize the African metropolis' (Dickson, 2014: 78). Put slightly differently, Beukes locates these open sites at the forefront of fictional imaginings that seek to dream up visions of a city 'yet to come' (Simone, 2004: 1).

Zoo City is littered with such sites "under construction" – sites in which the haunting of the past is framed in far more optimistic terms than the ones we encounter in Beukes's portrayal of Huron's sinister home. One of the more upscale places that Zinzi goes to visit, for example, is Johannesburg's Rand Club: described by Zinzi as a relic of the city's 'Wild West Days, when it was frequented by Cecil John Rhodes and other colonial slumlords' (2010: 33). Zinzi uses this urban tribute to empire and extraction to finalise one of the online scams that she drafts as a means of paying off her drug debts to Vuyo, her former drug dealer. This particular scam involves an American couple who Zinzi has succeeded in making believe that they will profit from financially assisting the refugee from Côte D'Ivoire that she has been posing as. Thus, through the performance of this scam, the Rand Club's colonial history is reclaimed and transformed – as individuals such as Zinzi and Vuyo, who would historically have been excluded from the club, enter and re-frame this site on their own terms and according to their needs, in this case, to complete a new form of skulduggery enabled by the fluid realm of cyberspace. Zinzi visits many other such spaces of urban fluidity – like 'Makhaza's Place', which serves as the local hang-out for Johannesburg's zoo citizens. Here, the city's past forms part of the creation of new urban locales. Situated on the second floor of 'what used to be a shopping arcade back when this part of town was cosmopolitan central', Mak's Place is now frequented by 'the squatters' who have made Hillbrow their home, who drink locally brewed beer whilst being surrounded by the remnants of the inner-city's 'Former Life', which finds expression in a variety of old mannequins that clutter the bar still dressed in their original clothing: a male manikin wears, for instance, a pair of 'sharp-pressed corduroy pants, a lime sweater vest and a fedora' while a female figure wears a 'moth-eaten white mini-dress and go-go boots', both figures 'arrested in some forlorn pose of retro cool' (2010: 43).

A sense is created, then, of parts of Johannesburg as being comprised of various temporal fragments and layers, some of which haunt or surface in a present quite different from the past. At work here, in other words, is a much more positive and generative form of haunting than one which simply signals the continued return of the past. We encounter this idea similarly evoked by Mbembe in his work on Johannesburg: ‘in the wake of the collapse of apartheid’, he writes, ‘the collage of fragments of the former city is opening up a space for experiences of displacement, substitution, and condensation, none of which is purely and simply a repetition of a repressed past’ (Mbembe, 2008: 38). Following Mbembe, instead of holding the city ransom to its history and bound to its eternal re-enactment, the ruins of the past are serving as the raw materials through which Johannesburg is looking to imagine itself anew – ‘Johannesburg is nowadays a metropolis increasingly forced to construct itself out of heterogeneous fragments and fortuitous juxtapositions of images, memories, citations, and allusions drawn from its splintered histories’ (2008: 59). In Beukes’s portrayal of Mak’s Place, the ‘mark of the past’ is thus ‘only a trace’; taking the ‘form of borrowed elements graphed onto another context’ as a rupture takes place ‘between the racist past and the metropolitan present, between here and there and between memories of things and events [which] renders possible the production of new figural forms and calls into play a chain of substitutions’ (2008: 63). Zinzi’s narration of these transitional areas allows, then, for reflection on Johannesburg as ‘a city of deconstructed images’; made up ‘of different layers of historical time superimposed upon one another’ (Mbembe, 2008: 63 - 64). Nowhere is this more palpable than in the novel’s investment in the Gothic mode – in that register that we have encountered, throughout this study, as the mode of binary destabilisation par excellence. Gothic’s contribution to *Zoo City* is thus that it allows Beukes to evoke a narrative in which *both* sides of Johannesburg’s story are graphed onto one another: showing us, on the one hand, the city’s spaces of stagnation and its portentous underworld, and, on the other, the city’s sites of light and lines of flight – its locales of transition and hope.

In this respect, Beukes’s use of Gothic’s interest in supernatural motifs plays a particularly significant role. It is, after all, Zinzi’s *magical capacity* to find lost things that allows her to invoke Johannesburg as a city comprised of its connection between surface and underground – because she can snag ‘the threads’ that unspool away from people and run ‘deep under the city’ (2010: 9). The result of this is that Zinzi sees the city more for its ‘strings’, ‘cobwebs and ‘wisps’ of connection than for its disparities, for her, the trick to getting to know Johannesburg is ‘all about figuring out which string to tug on’ (2010: 6). Zinzi’s *mashavi* – her talent for finding lost things – is also, significantly, what takes her to the invisible, unexplored parts of Johannesburg in the first place, to new spaces where she unearths parts of the city that normally go unseen by

everyday eyes. Her supernatural signature is thus one which engenders ways of perceiving the metropolis from new and unfamiliar angles that invoke ‘ex-centric visions’ – that is, visions that help us ‘make sense’, according to Jean Comaroff, ‘of the present and future of our world by means of the act of critical estrangement’ (2009: 35). Put slightly differently, Zinzi’s magical ability – which she has earned from her disgraced zoo status – is thus not simply a sign of condemnation, but also way of accumulating knowledge and power; to be animalled is, in this case, to possess ‘a hidden gift’ (Dickson, 2014: 75). This gift entails what Dickson describes as the capability that Zinzi’s animalled perception has to ‘estrangle’ and ‘unsettle’ representations of Johannesburg, and thus to ‘make us think with vocabularies that do not yet exist’ (2014: 77). The value of the estranging effects of Beukes’s implementation of Gothic’s techniques, in other words, is that it ‘demands cognitive works on the part of the reader’ to imagine the city in ways that ‘resist foreclosure or simple substitution’ – thus allowing for renewed perspectives on Johannesburg as the ‘hardened’ and ‘bland realities of the city’ become dislocated ‘from the regularity that renders them mundane’ (2014: 77).

Conclusion: A Change in Texture

As a means of concluding, I want to build on Dickson’s suggestion, which I find useful for the emphasis that it places on the ability that Zinzi holds to provide the reader with new imaginings of the city through her magical skill for finding lost things. I want to propose, however, that there is a crucial point about Zinzi’s *mashavi* that Dickson fails to recognise – the fact that Zinzi’s power is one which she earns through her relationship with *Sloth*. Her power is, in other words, something that she has gained as the result of her *past*. Zinzi is thus forced to occupy a present moment ghosted by the past – a haunting that seems, on its surface, to mimic those hauntings that we encounter in fictions written during South Africa’s transitional period, which were characterised by a literary evocations of the nation as a “haunted house”, where the country’s apartheid history was predominantly invoked through a return of a past which would rather be forgotten⁵. This chapter has argued that *Zoo City*’s deployment of Gothic tropes allows for the

⁵ The most explicitly Gothic of these transitional texts is arguably Marlene Van Niekerk’s *Triomf* (1999), which is set in the suburb of ‘Triomf’, an area in Johannesburg that used to be a black township called ‘Sophiatown’ until it was reclaimed by the apartheid legislation to make way for a white settlement. The novel shows us, however, that the traces of Sophiatown continue to haunt Triomf – a Gothic thematic that Van Niekerk manifest through the Benade family, who regularly find bits and pieces of glass and rubble surface in their backyard- the remnants of the now-destroyed Sophiatown. In *Triomf*, the past is represented, thus, as a place of unease and dis-ease that is ‘not diffused but deferred’ (Shear, 2006: 93) – notably expressed through the monstrous figure of Lambert, the son of an incestuous union between his mother and her brother, who shepherds in the country’s first democratic election by violently mauling his

creation of un-bifurcated visions of Johannesburg, a vision that I now want to extend to include its imagining of Zinzi's past. Ultimately, *Zoo City*'s intervention is that it looks to one of Gothic's primary interests – *the past* – and actively uses it to imagine 'new figural forms' (Mbembe, 2008: 63) of living in the world that are non-violent, and perhaps most significantly, inclusive as opposed to exclusive. It is this inclusive script that is *Zoo City*'s overarching message, relayed to us through the novel's final image, which depicts Zinzi at the Limpopo border, ready to cross from Johannesburg to Kinshasa in search of Benoît's missing family – an action that she considers 'the best thing I've done with my miserable life' (2010: 309). Beukes's expression of the past is radically different, then, to this restricted and backwards gaze, which looks to invoke the past through negativity only – via a Gothic return of the repressed. In contrast to this figuration, the novel presents the past as something that pulls Zinzi both backwards and forwards; and thus figures the past as both positive and negative, both 'gift' and 'curse' (2010: 6) – such that *Zoo City* performs a simultaneous dialogue with the past and future.

family, who, at the novel's conclusion, appear to be left with no alternative but to live in a new South Africa that does not seem to have a place for them.

Conclusion

Opening up to the Future: Gothic in and beyond the City

This project has sought to provide an inquiry into the African city by considering its Gothic representation in contemporary Nigerian and South African fiction. My aim has been to show *Zoo City*, *Nineveh* and *Lagoon* to be bound by a shared interest in the Gothic form, and to read the Gothic lens provided by Beukes, Okorafor and Rose-Innes as a particularly useful mode through which to review the African city in a new and generative way. The Gothic mode, I have suggested, is generative because it is what provides these novels with the capacity to produce a unique perspective on the African metropolis – a *Gothic perspective* that ‘sheds’, as David Punter reminds us, ‘a different kind of light, which also includes darkness and shadow’ (2011: 12). We might think of the Gothic outlook which these texts encode as likened to that of *chiaroscuro*: the intermingling of light and darkness (Punter, 2011: 12). This notion of intermingling is central to Gothic and thus vital, as well, to the texts that constitute this study: through their active deployment of Gothic and its various devices, *Zoo City*, *Lagoon* and *Nineveh* perform a discourse that mixes contrasts and fuses polarities – and, in doing so, speak to us in a Gothic language that is ‘a *mixed language* of hope and despair’ (Punter, 1996: 213, italics mine). By turning to the Gothic form, Beukes, Okorafor and Rose-Innes are able to generate texts in which Manichean divisions are thrown into light and placed under question – and it is for *this very reason* that we encounter Gothic at work, in varying degrees, in the writings of these authors. The implementation of Gothic in *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* illustrates that this form is a useful and valuable fictional mode because it enables these texts to question the stability of the oppositional codes that give the world its conventional shape, which they achieve by subverting conventional dualistic codes in a series of ways. In this sense, Gothic in these novels aligns them with the form’s overarching purpose – to serve as a genre that ‘variously questions, compromises and challenges the way in which the world is understood’ (Smith and Hughes, 2013: 4).

This notion of subverting the ways in which we comprehend the world is particularly patent in Rose-Innes’s *Nineveh*, which formed the textual focus of my first chapter. Here, I read the novel with recourse to its investment in Gothic’s liminal devices. I suggested that Rose-Innes’s portrayal of liminal zones and conditions of ‘in-between-ness’ serve as sites of subversion that she positions as emblems to be brought against the individualising, border-building effects that the project of neoliberalism has had on contemporary Cape Town. I invoked *Nineveh*’s nomadic ending as the central metaphor for this subversion by reading Katya’s ‘becoming-insect’

as a symbolic act of dissent against the fortress city. I posited this act of dissent as holding the capacity to engender not only a form of subversion against the neoliberal order, but also as offering the potential to provoke insight into future ethical behaviours that take stock of a fundamental interconnection, interdependency and relationality between self and other. Gothic, in this regard, can be understood as implemented in *Nineveh* as a means of envisioning the formation of a form of urban-living characterised by mobility and connection – a mode of urban existence that does not ascribe to the divided, and therefore *bifurcated* codings, that characterise neoliberal Cape Town.

I moved, in my second chapter, from South to West to consider Gothic's manifestation in Okorafor's *Lagoon*. Here, we encountered a strong focus on West-African mythological narratives, and considered how these work in the novel to furnish a vision of African urbanity that embeds 'an animist unconscious' (Garuba, 2003) into everyday life and practice. This animist framework, I suggested, is aligned with Gothic thinking in that it enables Okorafor to generate a fictional version of Lagos wherein a series of dichotomies are dismantled – including those between magic and modernity, local and global, nature and culture, human and non-human. The chapter concluded by making some reflections on the dichotomy of human versus environment by suggesting that the novel has significant implications for current ecological thought and praxis. My suggestion here was that, through the text's deployment of the Gothic motifs of enchantment and fantasy, *Lagoon* might draw into being, in new and inventive ways, connections between urbanites and the ocean. In this respect, I read *Lagoon* as looking to place Lagos at the forefront of a global discourse that seeks to reorient our thinking beyond rigid bio-social binaries and, in doing so, aid us in recognising anew 'the whole of which we are a part' (Beatley, 2014: 165).

My third chapter transported us back to South Africa to attend to Beukes's *Zoo City*, which I suggested was the most explicitly Gothic of the three novels considered in this study. My argument here was that *Zoo City* draws on an arsenal of Gothic machinery to evoke Johannesburg as a *compositional city* – that is, as a city comprised of an interplay between its sites of hope and despair, its surface and underground parts, as well as between its past and present. My intention in this chapter was to illustrate how *Zoo City*'s turn to Gothic results in the formation of complex and multi-webbed visions of contemporary Johannesburg. In this vein, Gothic in *Zoo City* proved particularly generative because it allowed for reflection on the city as a urban-centre constituted in and by multiplicity; as a place made up 'heterogeneous fragments and fortuitous juxtapositions of images, memories, citations, and allusions' and 'of different layers of historical time superimposed upon one another' (Mbembe, 2008: 59 & 64). I concluded the

chapter by considering the significance that *Zoo City* evinces by way of its portrayal of Zinzi's past, a Gothic thematic that I argued generates new modes of post-apartheid imaginings that actively make use of the past as a means of moving forward as opposed to being pulled backward. The novel's incorporation of Zinzi's past served here as a means of envisioning new and inclusive modes of urban belonging and thus serves as a Gothic motif that the text deploys to envisage a productive form of haunting that encodes as much a dialogue with the past as a discourse of futurity.

What connects all of these works, then, is a fictional investment in *Gothic thinking* – that is to say, in making use of critical modes that take as their basis a language of mixing to offer reflection on the workings of the contemporary city in Africa. Much of these workings have to do with the Manichean distinctions that characterise the present-day African metropolis: a marked thematic that we encounter in each of these works is a continual reference, for example, to growing divides in the city between rich and poor. In *Nineveh*, these disparities are manifested through the novel's depiction of Nineveh-estate, the gated development that lies nestled against Cape Town's growing shacklands, which Rose-Innes brings to ruination in order to knit into 'new patterns' (2011: 193) that bridge these divides. *Lagoon*, too, gestures to Lagos as structured along wealth/poverty polarities, dichotomies that Okorafor looks to destabilise through the continual emphasis that she places on hybridity; by way of her celebration, in other words, of places of *mixing* like the littoral parts of Lagos, which she evokes as revolutionary sites that hold the capacity to renew and revitalise the city by dismantling the binaries that constitute its social and environmental make-up. *Zoo City* similarly critiques growing class divisions by rendering the affluent and gated estate of one of the novel's primary villains a place of rot and decay, whilst positioning the poorest parts of Johannesburg as sites of transformation and hope. In this sense, Gothic can be understood as serving as a means for all three texts to cast light on the divisions that make up the African city and its character, and thus to critique the effects that global, neoliberal capitalism has had, and continues to have, on the continent and its urban centres.

Another parallel can be drawn, then, between these works, one that is intimately connected with the cycles that govern neoliberalism's agenda of accumulating capital; of making way for rapid urbanisation while the ecological is placed, increasingly, under erasure. This is a spectre, to make use of a Gothic phrase, which hovers over all three of the texts that I have focused my analysis on, and it is here, I think, that we arrive at the crux of the matter – that is, at the potentialities that *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* together unfold. Significant to all of these works is some or other encounter between human and environment: in each text we find reference, for example, to an interspecies relationship. This is perhaps most palpable in *Zoo City*'s

rendition of Zinzi's zooed body, a corporeality that collapses the distinctions between her body and Sloth's body; between human and animal. Such an interspecies corporeal imagining is patent in *Lagoon* and *Nineveh* as well: in *Lagoon*, we find a notable investment in hybrid bodies – of which Adaora's transformation from human to 'half-human...half-fish' (2014: 263) is exemplary – while *Nineveh*'s interest in the collapse between human and non-human is expressed through the novel's envisioning of Katya's sieve-like skin 'every second letting microscopic creatures in and out' (2011: 207).

At work in these three novels is thus not simply a Gothic envisioning of the African city, but also a budding Gothic aesthetic of the African Anthropocene. Gothic in *Zoo City*, *Lagoon* and *Nineveh* is enabling, in other words, the ascendance of more complex and un-bifurcated imaginings of the city in Africa, while simultaneously serving to transport these texts *beyond* the urban to consider Africa's place in the Anthropocenic period that we currently inhabit – the era where the human has become a literal geological force altering both the surface of the planet as well as its life-forms. Significant to the Anthropocene is that it is an era that 'marks', as Matthew Omelsky puts it, 'the dissolution of the human-nature divide' (2014: 37). At the heart of Anthropocenic studies is thus the question of the *future* because this is the era when humans act not solely as humans but also as non-humans – 'as a geological force on the planet, changing its climate for millennia to come' (Chakravorty, 2012: 2). The notion of the future, as well as of the human's connection to the non-human, are vital to each of the texts that comprise this study. What binds these works is not solely their Gothic invocation of African urbanity, but also their depiction of African urbanites whose human-bodies are imagined as *liminal* bodies – as Gothic sites of boundary collapse where the distinctions between the human and animal are ruptured as the urbanite is placed, instead, in a symbiotic relationship that culminates in a physiological relationship between human and non-human.

What is particularly salient about these symbiotic relationships is that they resemble the urban-futures that *Zoo City*, *Lagoon* and *Nineveh* seek to invoke – by placing, at their centre, urbanites who extend the boundaries of that which is purely a human invention – the *city* – to include a more meaningful engagement with the non-human natural world. Put slightly differently, through their various depictions of interspecies corporealities, these texts insert themselves into a larger project that looks 'to grow a new urban culture that is profoundly aware of the natural environment' (Beately, 2013: xviii). As such, what binds *Zoo City*, *Lagoon* and *Nineveh* is not simply a shared interest in espousing Gothic's apparatus to render the African city open to non-dualistically opposed readings, but also their mobilisation of Gothic to actively engage with the concerns that constitute the Anthropocenic moment. These are African texts, in

other words, which are beginning to develop ‘a new urban sensibility’ (Beatley, 2013: xviii) that seeks to connect to other forms of life. The visions that we encounter in the writings of Rose-Innes, Okorafor and Beukes are resonant, then, with the recent writings of Dipesh Chakrabarty, who calls for a form of ‘species thinking’ – a temporal perspective that formulates the human as one species among many on the planet, characterised by a deep sense of connection in ‘the way different life-forms connect to one another’ (2009: 217 - 218). It is apparent to me that this idea of *connection* is an essential one to *Zoo City*, *Lagoon* and *Nineveh* – and they are looking, in different ways, to harness the power of the Gothic form to realise this concern. The reason for this is that Gothic is ultimately all about connection; it provides us with a ready-made language to talk about many different kinds of blurrings and bindings. Significant to this study is that these texts deploy Gothic to engage with both local and global issues, and to bring these to dialogue – and, in doing so, position themselves as fictions that open up into the twenty-first century to connect with major pressing political and social concerns that confront not only the African continent, but also the broader world. These are texts that engender reflection on the relationship between culture and environment, and which prompt the contemporary reader to consider the global future – and, as such, situate Africa at the forefront of planetary discourse.

The value of this engagement becomes particularly discernible when we place these texts in dialogue with the broader tradition of Gothic writing in Africa. Here, I want to return one final time to Reza de Wet’s ‘African Gothic’ in order to highlight the text’s sedentary conclusion, which depicts its protagonists stationary and immobile, incapable of moving beyond the violence of their history. Notable in ‘African Gothic’, in other words, is its representation of the *future-as-past*; raised metaphorically through the siblings, Sussie and Frikkie, who ‘shut down on tomorrow’ (Boehmer, 1998: 45) because they remain unable, at the text’s close, to imagine a future that could exist beyond their past. This trajectory of African Gothic fiction is characterised, thus, by a turning inwards, and by a shutting down – but also, significantly, by a focus on human issues, exemplified by the incestuous Sussie and Frikkie, who can only inhabit the present through a continual backwardness; the only reality available to them being the past. Gothic, I want to venture, is currently being mobilised by Beukes, Okorafor and Rose-Innes to consciously re-imagine this tradition of Gothic writing in Africa, a tradition marked by a backward gaze and by singular interest in human concerns. In contrast to this tradition, *Nineveh*, *Lagoon* and *Zoo City* are opening up, at every turn, and in many different ways, to consider the *future* of the African city, but also, significantly, to cast light – a light that incorporates darkness and shadow – on the futures that lie beyond culture, beyond the urban, beyond the human.

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